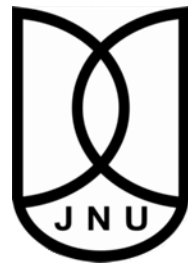


**NARRATIVE SELF-IDENTITY: ROLE OF AUTHENTICITY AND
MORAL IMAGINATION IN CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF**

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
for the award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled “Narrative Self-Identity: Role of Authenticity and Moral Imagination in Construction of the Self,” submitted by Solomon Zingkhai in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted either in part or in full in this or other university.

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Solomon Zingkhai

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PREFACE

The present study is an attempt to explore how, a narrative in response to the Socratic precept that an unexamined life is not worth living, constructs an identity for the self. Narrative in holding a middle ground between the exalted self and the humiliated self asserts that, a response to the question “Who am I?” can be made only, when we realize that life is reflective of the choices we make in dialogue with the others. Therefore, the self, in a narrative is neither indefinable with an immutable substantiality that is impervious to evolution nor simply reducible to an incoherent series of events. The self for that matter is never given at the start but is a construct that reflects the dynamic identity that is peculiar to the life which is woven of stories heard and told. It is said to involve both a process of sedimentation as well as innovation.

However, given the fact that narrative involves recognition of our dialogical interdependence with the others for whom and with whom our stories are told in conjunction, identity is not to be understood in terms of an isolated project. This directs us to a very important question that is, who is or whose voice can be considered as the voice of authority behind all these actions. Moreover, given that fact narrative lies at the intersection between the world of fiction and history there is always this tendency to confabulate and so misrepresent life. So, the challenge here is, how are we to give a narrative account of ourselves that is truly reflective of who we are, without losing touch of the realities of a dynamic life that surround us.

Thus, the present study, which indeed is a continuation of the work that I had earlier taken up in my M.Phil Dissertation titled “Paul Ricoeur on Self, Narrative Identity and Agency,” is an attempt to find ways that would strengthen the account of narrative self-identity. The proposition here is that, the process of narration can be made more reliable if it is qualified by two factors. First, in response to the concern with selective narration and its related question, “What it means to be at one with oneself?,” one can emphasize on the need for an engagement with the voice of authenticity. Again, concerning the world of possibilities that can be thrown open, by the choices made available to us, one can ask, “Can a conventional account of narrative capture the dynamic nature of self and its concern for the good?” A positive response to such type of queries can be provided only if one is to resort to moral imagination. So, perhaps, moral imagination in unveiling possibilities of which we were never aware of would help us not only to capture life, in all its varieties but also enrich our account, of who we are.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Nature of Self

What is to be a self? As a matter of fact, despite the best of our efforts to capture what the self consist in or who the self is, following the Socratic maxim “Know yourself,” there is no universal consent, not even a widespread consensus, on what it actually means to be a self. On the contrary, contemporary discussions about the nature of self are riddled with conflicting and competing conceptions and definitions of it. Perhaps, a good way to understand why things are how they stand is because, as Alan Watts would put it, “Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth.” The elusive nature of the self is such that it has often led many a thinker to question the legitimacy of the concept of self as to whether it exists in reality or it is merely a social construct—simply to be dismissed off as an illusion. Nonetheless, despite such doubts and misgivings the enterprise of trying to understand and define who we are is quintessentially a philosophical enterprise that would continue, no matter whatever be the nature of its outcome and despite our failure to come up with a convincing response. Therefore, our quest here, far from arriving at a satisfactory explanation, is an attempt to come to an understanding, however insignificant or partial it maybe, of the dynamic nature of a narrative self and its open-ended pursuits.

To start with, one can say that a proper study of the self can be traced as far as the time of the ancient Greeks, when Socrates in reflecting on the nature of self said that, “to talk every day about virtue and the other things about which you hear me talking and examining myself and others is the greatest good to man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living.”¹ Taking a cue from this reflection on self understanding and the rest of the arguments that follows it, both in favor or against it, one can observe that a reconstruction and reassessment of a self identity is normally accompanied by conflicting responses. Normally, the queries concerning the self are of the nature, is the self as such necessarily embodied and embedded in a physical, social, and

¹ Plato, *Apology*, 38a, in *Plato: Complete Works*, eds., John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 981-982.

historical environment? Can the conception of self be self-explanatory? To what extent does selfhood involve interpersonal relations? Thus, what begins as a purely epistemological or metaphysical exercise of knowing the self turns out to be more. The task of understanding the self is not to be seen as an isolated project that can be restricted, particularly, to a process of self-introspection, as many would have it, but demands a thorough engagement with the nature of experiences that underlie one's commitments at various levels such as one's physical, intellectual, ethical, and social engagements.

In our case, the self that we intend to construct is dependent not on the immediate positing of a subject as is the case with the Cartesian cogito but a self that is a result of reflective mediation. The self-awareness and knowledge that we are trying to arrive at is not explainable merely in terms of an individual's right, but in virtue of relations he or she shares with others and in adopting the perspective of the others toward an understanding of ourselves. In this case as Ricoeur would have it, self-identity is not to be understood in terms of a single univocal usage but in terms of the dialectic between sameness (*idem*) and self-hood or self constancy (*ipse*). The equivocity of the term is because of the fact that these two terms converge at the point of temporality, understood in terms of permanence. However, in case of *idem* identity, sameness is understood in terms of that which is contrary to diversity and has permanence as its highest order. It is opposed to the idea of that which is ever changing or variable. But in case of *ipse* identity there is no assertion of some unchanging core, rather it stands for a sense of self constancy and involves a sense of dialectic between the "self" and the "other than self." However, this involvement of the other is not to be understood merely in a comparative sense but as a kind of otherness that is constitutive of the selfhood. Thus, it has been said that one cannot be a self on one's own, but only together with others.

This hermeneutical understanding of the self is one where the self is said to be positioned at equidistance from both an apology of the cogito as well as its overthrow. It is said to stand in between the "I" understood as something that is posited absolutely, with no reference to an other and the "I" understood relatively as requiring the intrinsic complement of inter-subjectivity. It is by way of a detour of the analysis of action that the self, in providing an answer to the four-fold questions of "who?", the identity is said to constructed, an identity which help avoid the dilemma

of resorting either to an exalted subject or a humiliated subject.² The kind of self that is reflexively implied and the kind of self that we hope to arrive at is said to give rise to a kind of narrative identity where “To say *self* is not to say *I*.” Here, one cannot but agree with the observation that “Narrative identity is invariably intersubjective because it is a text woven of stories heard and told.”³

Taking into consideration the kind of identity that we are trying to arrive at, it has to be noted that underlying such understanding of the self, we have for our basis an account of narrative that can truly reflect who we are without losing touch of the reality that surround us. Narrative in this sense, as defined by Ricoeur, is a kind of identity where, “The person understood as a character in a story, is not an entity, distinct from his or her ‘experiences.’ Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted.”⁴ Thus, the justification of opting for such a narrative understanding of self is as explained by Ricoeur, “we tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated,” because “the story stands for the person.”⁵ However, in a narrative, though we construct our selves by telling our stories, the beginning of our story, the act through which we were conceived, belong to our parents and as for death, it will be recounted by those who survive us.⁶ It follows from this that, one cannot claim to have complete control over our narrative as our story is created for the other and is always told in conjunction with the stories of the others.⁷ In this sense, the narrative model of identity thus revives the age-old virtue of self-knowledge, not as some self-regarding ego but as an examined life freed from narcissism and solipsism through a recognition of our dialogical interdependence vis-a-vis the others.⁸

² The four subcategories of questions are as follows, *who* is it that speaks by designating himself or herself as “locator”? *who* is the agent of the action? *who* is recounting about himself or herself narrates? *Who* is the moral subject of imputation?

³ Richard Kearney and James Williams, “Narrative and Ethics” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes, Vol. 70 (1996), 36.

⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 147.

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 75.

⁶ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 160.

⁷ Ricoeur writes in “By narrating a life of which I am not the author as to existence, I make myself its coauthor as to its meaning.” (Page 162)

⁸ Richard Kearney and James Williams, “Narrative and Ethics,” 36.

Well aware of the problems that trouble the account of narrative identity, the main objective of this study is to make an attempt to understand whether or not it is possible to construct an account of the self that in seeking to address the question, “Who am I” comes up with a convincing narrative account of the self.⁹ A positive response to this question would be on that in adopting the Socratic dictum “Know Thyself” is complemented by the observation that “an examined life is not worth living.” Our proposal here is that a good, if not a satisfactory response to the above question can be given in form of a narrative construction of life. However, this is possible only if in the process of narration, the act of storytelling is qualified by two characteristic features which we would argue are fundamental to the act of narration. Firstly of all, our primary concern is with the process of selection, which as a defining characteristic of narrative involves a selective projection of how the story is to be told. This act of selective projection is taken up keeping in mind the goal it intends to achieve. However, while this function is primarily instrumental in ensuring a sense of connectivity and coherence, it also carries with it the likelihood of confabulating things to such an extent that we deviate from the truth. So one of the factors that can interject and keep in control such process of selective narration can be in form of the question “what does it mean to be at one with oneself?” or in other words a concern with the question of authenticity.

The next factor that we need to take into consideration is built around the fact that as actions refigured by narrative opens up numerous possibilities, it points to a life that is rich in anticipation of an ethical nature. Correspondingly our ability to choose is dependent on that what is seen and heard and in this case telling a story reflects the dynamic nature of life and calls for the employment of a vast imaginative space. However, as moral reality is context dependent and thus particularist, there comes a point in life where the complexity of the situation cannot be captured by the plainness of traditional moral rules and this calls for a richer and more varied form of inquiry. It calls for the intervention of moral imagination which, in response to the question “how can we achieve a life that is worth living?”, direct us to a world of new possibilities. Therefore, the focus of the study is to examine the kind of the self-identity that might result from an enriched process of narration, that takes into account the role of authentic self-articulation and

⁹ Kim Atkins in the introductory chapter of her book *Narrative Identity and Moral Identity: A Practical Perspective* writes that the question about who I am and what I should do are not merely matters for introspection but the very issues around which our lives are intrinsically related and is intersubjective.

moral imagination, introduced with the intent that they would strengthen and sharpen the process of narrative articulation.

One of the primary concerns of the study stems from the apprehension that if the self as a construct that is articulated in the form of a narrated story, involves a kind of revisionism then how accurate or authentic can that act of narration about the self be?¹⁰ Moreover, given the fact that self is never a complete picture that is given once and for all but an ongoing project, that involves a series of possible accounts and revisionism while striving towards that which is good, what then are the normative constraints operational in such a kind of narrative? What is the role of imagination in such narratives? How far is imagination in the process of narrative construction constrained by questions of truth? Any attempt to respond to these questions calls for a major reassessment of the form of narrative itself, considering the fact that the question of self itself remains elusive. This is because, the question of authenticity, in embodying a certain individualistic vision of the good, is to begin with a slippery concept that is always accompanied by a fear of self-deception coupled with the fear of finding oneself to be only a copy or a replica.¹¹ Moreover, the task of articulating the self becomes more problematic, especially, given that the task is to come up with a reliable account of who we really are.¹² It is complicated by the fact that the interpretative enterprise of sense making that a narrative approach adopts in itself is complex.

The question that immediately arises about this attempt is, if a narrative construction of self involves a kind of choosing of the story that we want to project, on the one hand and the concept of authenticity implies being true to oneself, on the other hand, where then is the common meeting ground between narrative self-identity and authentic self-articulation? This is because on a closer examination, it can be shown that even in case of the choices that we make every day, making sense of what is real as something opposed to mere imagination, does not come easily. And the fact that we continue to make these choices regularly mirrors the truth that

¹⁰ One way in which we can practically engage with this question is through a study of autobiographies. A key element of constructing a narrative identity here is in terms of recollecting and organizing memories into a coherent biographical view. This selective process of structuring is critical to our understanding of the sense of agency that develops in the process as it is reflective of the paradigm shifts that the self undergoes.

¹¹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 24. He is quoting Allan Bloom writes that the greatest fear of modern man is the “horror of finding himself to be only a copy or a replica.”

¹² In reply to the question “what am I?” Descartes came to discover that the essential core of the “I” is a *res cogitans*. However, the kind of self that is the focus of this study is a self that in contrary to the Cartesian notion of self as a substance, that is pre-given, is an open-ended construct. In reply to the question “who am I?” we seek to construct a self that is articulated and structured by the symbolic mediations of narrative within a storied life.

reality as such, by its very nature, is complicated and accordingly, narrative in trying to capture this reality can be said to hold multiple and maybe even contradictory truths. Thus, while trying to arrive at the question of self, in trying to know myself and become who I want to be, there is no other way except for a continual process of asking, choosing, revising and living it. Therefore, while our stories do reflect the choices that we make, it, in being constitutive of what really matters to us reflects the kind of identity that we are striving for.

All these talks of choices then further direct our attention to the question of possibilities and in turn to the question of moral imagination. To start with, the kind of choices that we make while articulating our stories and which in turn shapes our identities are not restricted by a pre-existing framework of values.¹³ Rather in the process of making these choices, we are engaged in a process of continually creating and recreating the boundaries and this is where one is said to witness the ingenious workings of narrative imagination. While it is true that not all acts of choosing are to be read as deviations from the truths, our choice of articulations can also be understood as acts of character formation that defines who we are. Furthermore, these choices in being constitutive of who we are and reflective of what we strive for, can also be understood as choices articulated towards the pursuit of good. This ideal of striving towards the good stands as a common ground of interest between authenticity and narrative as well as narrative and moral imagination. It ushers in a sense of ethicality into our narratives and thus into the kind of self that we are constructing. Therefore, narrative in being involved with actions that are complex and rich, and in striving towards that which is good can be said to anticipate a story that is not simply rich in values but is reflective of the realities of life and truth.

Therefore, in trying to understand the process of narrative construction of the self, the focus of the study is concerned with the ways as to how notions of moral imaginations can play a vital role in giving a richer and fuller account of who we are. This is because narrative to start with finds its major justification in serving as a middle ground between the description of action and its prescription and in the process acts as “a propaedeutic to ethics.”¹⁴ In this sense,

¹³ Gadamer for instance in *Truth and Method* advocates that a basic method of understanding things is through conversation. To begin with understanding and interpretation always occur from within a particular horizon that is determined by our historically-determined situatedness. However, the horizon of understanding is neither static nor unchanging. It is never limited by the horizons of its situation. At the end, it is a matter of dialogue, a “fusion of Horizons” that leads to the formation of a new context of meaning as a result of negotiation between the familiar and that what is otherwise unfamiliar.

¹⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 116

literature is said to provide the vast experimental field where one can try out the various estimations and evaluations which in turn are found to be subjected to acts of approval and condemnation. Primarily the act of storytelling involves an exchange of “experiences” understood in terms of an “exercise of practical wisdom.”¹⁵ So, literary narratives, in opening the door for ethics to see possibilities in terms of human desire rather than exclusively in terms of rules can complement and humanize the abstract theoretical systems of strict moral rules. Here, the question of self-identity involves projecting oneself in a narrative, onto a world of which one is both a creative agent and a receptive actor or as Ricoeur would say the actor as well as the sufferer.

Therefore, what begins as the need for a narrative engagement with a story that is reflective of a concern with the concept of authenticity is also found to be tied up closely with a concern that is directed towards the question of choice making and the possibilities made available. The question of expanding the range of possibilities is found to be linked with the ideal of a good life. It requires of the narrative to come up with a novel scheme of fittingly reflecting one’s “true self” understood in terms of the choices that are made available. In carrying out this task, apart from a usual engagement with narrative imagination we need to make provisions for the operation of another factor, i.e., morality, which is usually said to accompany imagination and operate with it in a hypothetical mode.¹⁶ Hence, if narrative articulation has to come up with an account of the self that in truthfully recounting stories of the choices reflects our authenticity then it also involves exploring alternatives that go beyond the reach of conventional morality to what is known as moral imagination.

In trying to address this subject, the primary objective of the study will be restricted to questions that deal with issues and concerns which are more epistemological in nature. And in doing so, we will, in accordance with the concepts that constitute the focus of our discussion, engage selectively with the works of philosophers like Kant, Rousseau, Heidegger Sartre, Ricoeur, Taylor, Nussbaum and others.

¹⁵ Ibid., 164.

¹⁶ With regard to the question of morality, Ricoeur for instance is of the view that in a narrative, “Telling a story, we observed, is deploying an imaginary space for thought experiments in which moral judgment operates in a hypothetical mode.”

As it has been already pointed out this study will address question whether in constructing a narrative account of self one can come up with a structure within which the concept of authenticity and moral imagination be purposefully incorporated. An answer in the affirmative would led to the subsequent questions of what are the possible ways in which a narrative construction can throw light on the self in its quest for the meaning of life? What if any would be the novelty that an interpretative engagement of narrating one's life experiences brings to the question of authenticity and moral imagination? And what significance would these understandings hold in relation to the current debates that concerns the notion of narrative self-identity?

An articulation of authenticity requires of a person that the motives and reasons that she or he is moved by and act on, apart from being unconstrained, should entail a "language of personal resonance."¹⁷ So what kind of a narrative construct would fittingly engage with the practical questions that surrounds the issue of authenticity? Given that in a narrative, since the beginning nor the end of our stories is our own and the fact that we, in telling our stories, always tell them in conjunction with the stories of the others, which impinges upon us directly or indirectly, so in this case how authentic can our telling of the stories be? Who in this sense is the author? Whose voice are we to listen to? Moreover, as narrating a story involves selective telling or even inventing, keeping in mind the others for whom the story is intended, there is always the question concerning the truth of the narration, as to how much of it is reflective of reality or confabulated always arises?

This takes us to the next set of questions that we will be addressing in relation to the construction of our identity following a narrative interpretation of our life. Can the practical questions of self identity surrounding the notion of authenticity, understood as a way of aiming at a good life, be satisfactorily answered with the employment of a conventional narrative account? What can be the constituent factors that are essential if one is to come up with a practical account of personal identity that is expressive of who we really are and at the same time aims for that which is good? This conceivably calls into play an examination of the workings of a narrative that employs both the role of imagination. So that on the one hand, we are exposed to seeing in

¹⁷ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 90.

terms of more possibilities which in turn is said to broaden our horizon. On the other hand, such imaginative possibilities calls for the intervention of morality, so that in the course of our experiment with the possibilities open before us, we do not go off track but are kept grounded in the process.

With reference and in continuation of the challenges above we will look into questions of what is the nature and the kind of imagination that would be involved in coming up with such a notion of identity? Can imagination ever be considered as part of a truth generating process? And if yes, what would constitute the truth of imagination and what kind of a functional role will it have in the construction of an Identity? Similarly, since the kind of identity that we are seeking to construct is one that involves creation of values that lays beyond the conventional norms of morality it requires us to conjure up ideas that are novel and perceptive to the demands of the situation. Again, by virtue of the prerequisite that these norms do not simply include values that are unrestrictive but norms that are at the same time expressive of one's true self, the traditional system of morality is challenged. This calls for an imaginative and innovative thinking on the part of morality if it is ever to face the rising challenges and demands. Thus, the question raised would be concerning, what does it take to exercise moral imagination? What are the alternatives it provides in return? How does it contribute to the construction and strengthening of a narrative identity? In trying to answer these interrelated questions, I have divided my work into five chapters followed by conclusion. A brief summary of the chapters are given below.

2. An Overview of the Chapters

As the opening chapter of the thesis, in the first chapter, titled "Narrative Self", the focus is on understanding how a narrative self, that offer itself as a possible alternative to the two kinds of self, the exalted self as well as the humiliated self, is constructed. So we begin with an examination of how questions of narrative self-identity stands in providing an alternative account to that of the Cartesian and anti-Cartesian notions of the self. Following this, we will in the following section introduce and expound on the various concepts that will be used in the process of narration to weave an identity of the self. Particularly, apart from an exposition of the concepts of authenticity and moral imagination, which forms two of the key concepts of our

study and will be dealt with in greater detail, in the following chapters, we also look into the concept of temporality, autobiography and imagination in relation to the question of narrative construction. Following these introductions of the concepts, we proceed to examine how these concepts are related and how an engagement with these concepts will address issues that are crucial in defining and shaping narratives in the desired direction.

The focus of the second chapter, titled “Authenticity and Narrative,” is on an examination of the notion of authenticity and the relevance of its role in a narrative articulation of the self. Accordingly, we will trace the history of how a call to a life of self-discovery and self-fulfillment leads to the concept of authenticity. Here, we, in trying to explore the role of authenticity, begin with an examination of the reasons for its resurgence and the kind of contribution it can make in our understanding of narratives. Next, we, in trying to understand the import of authenticity, seek to explain how the normative bindings of authenticity are different from those principles on which the concept of sincerity and autonomy as such is structured. This discussion on the distinctiveness of authenticity is followed by an examination of the grounds on which various criticisms have been leveled against authenticity. This is followed by an examination of how the concept has evolved over the years in light of the demands that the society makes on the individual and how different it is from the popular conception or misconception of it. Here we will deal with the various explanations of authenticity given by philosophers like Rousseau, Heidegger, Sartre and Taylor followed by a comparative understanding of their respective philosophies. This discussion will be followed by an examination of how this evolved understanding of authenticity can be employed to strengthen the process of identity construction in a narrative. Therefore, the intent of this chapter is primarily to examine the role that authenticity plays in the construction of a self identity and the extent to which a narrative can accommodate the demands of authenticity in turn.

In the third chapter, titled “The Truth of Imagination,” we will be taking into consideration the role and contribution of imagination to the process of knowledge building, examine the possibility of imagination functioning as a truth generating enterprise, with due reference to narrative construction. To start with, the focus of this chapter is on how the concept of imagination has, over the years, evolved from a faculty that was at best said to be equipped with

a capacity to reproduce images to a faculty that is actively engaged in the process of producing knowledge. Following which, we will examine in detail how Kant's conception of imagination was responsible for turning around the fortunes of imagination, from its reproductive to productive function. So, in dealing with this understanding of imagination, as a medium of creativity, we proceed to explore the functioning of imagination as a means of possibility. This is followed by an examination of how the role of imagination in narrative, in constituting the plot, is responsible for redefining the existing boundaries and introducing possible alternatives. With this understanding of the role of imagination in narrative employment in place, we proceed further to examine what constitutes the world of unreal. Here, the focus of our discussion is on Sartre's and Ricoeur's work and their conceptions on how imagination works in creating and providing alternative possibilities, through the conception of an unreal world. Finally, understanding the limits and risk of an imagination that is unrestrained, we will in the last section of the chapter delve into the reasons why a better understanding of narrative imagination necessitates the need for a resort to moral imagination, if at all one is to engage in a meaningful construction of one's life.

In the fourth chapter, titled "Understanding Moral Imagination," we will examine in detail the idea of moral imagination and its implication which, together with the conception of authenticity, is necessary to strengthen the process of narrative articulation. This extension of narrative imagination to the sphere of moral imagination is said to be essential for capturing the dynamic nature of life itself. Thus, we would in the opening section of the chapter try to see the rationale behind the need to engage with the conception of morality in narration, understand its sources and then proceed to see why a conventional understanding of morality and the application of its rules is inadequate to address issues that concerns the question of self. On these lines, we will examine why morality, if at all it is going to have a productive engagement with our everyday situations, needs to adopt a case specific sensitivity to issues and respond accordingly. Then, we will proceed to discuss how a call for a true expression of the self in the course of narrating necessitates the involvement of an innovative thinking on the part of morality rather than simply opting for the conventional rules. Understanding the role of moral imagination in bringing a better understanding of our selves, the focus of this chapter is on understanding the

kind of possibilities it throws open which is said to enrich our life choices. Here we will, in order to understand how the opening of new possibilities help us not just broaden our base but even deepen our understanding of ourselves in relation to the other, engage with the works of Nussbaum, Taylor and Ricoeur on moral imagination. An examination of this will then take us to the next level of discussion on how an awareness of these possibilities strengthens one's sense of freedom and how it leads to broadening of the horizon that is responsible for shaping and reshaping one's identity.

The fifth chapter, titled "Revisiting Narrative Self Identity," involves an assessment of the extent to which the structure of narrative identity is strengthened with the incorporation of authenticity and moral imagination to the process of narration, which we, in the opening chapter, have proposed are essential to narrative construction. The roles of these two concepts are seen to be essential, given the fact that, narration invariably involves an inter-play of fact and fiction. In the attempt to articulate an account of the self and in the process of revising it, one can in order to bring a certain kind of desired stability into the act of narration, confabulate things to such an extent that it may take us away from the truth. This would rather than reflecting life distort it. Thus, keeping in mind the need for narrative articulation to remain true to its cause, i.e., to reflect life, we will in this chapter assess the extent to which the introduction of an authentic self articulation has helped narrative to construct a story that at the end is truly reflective of the self. We will also examine how the employment of moral imagination which is said to open up new possibilities helps us to broaden our horizon beyond the choices provided by conventional moral norms. This opening of possibilities, of reading the meaning of life anew, can be said to change even the course of a self narration. Therefore, in this chapter we will begin our assessment with an examination of arguments directed against narrativity and follow it up by trying to respond to them. In the process of responding to argument directed against narrative we will show that narrative with its fourfold features of diachronicity, form finding tendency, story-telling tendency and revisionism can and does provide a satisfying account of the self, provided it is supported by the two important concepts of authenticity and moral imagination.

CHAPTER 1

NARRATIVE SELF

In laying down the framework of the thesis, the main focus of this chapter will be on understanding the notion of a narrative self that is different from the substantialist understanding of an exalted self as well as a Nietzschean understanding of a shattered cogito. As the opening section of the thesis, we will seek to introduce and expound on the various concepts that will be employed to weave an identity of the self that is created in the process of narration. As a preparatory segment of the work it will also serve as a guide to show how these themes are related, will be correlated and how they work in tandem to come up with a narrative understanding of self. Following these introductions we will delve into questions that an engagement with these concepts raises, issues that are crucial in shaping and defining the workings of this thesis. In the process, we shall try our best to address these issues and provide answers whenever possible, answers to queries which even if left unanswered will be relevant in throwing light on how questions of authenticity, time, imagination and morality define our understanding of the self in a narrative.

The focus of this chapter is to study how a modern notion of substantial self was founding wanting and was replaced by a concept of self, so fluid and elusive that it was dismissed off as an illusion. This brought us nearly close to concluding that there is nothing such as a self or the question of self is unimportant. However, the question of self, no matter how problematic it may be, has been shown to be undeniably inevitable. Therefore, we will examine how narrative self-identity stands in providing an alternative account to that of the immutable and illusive notions of self.¹ Subsequently, if narrative engagements involve a selective telling of the events then further question can be raised as to how authentic those notions of self can be. What are the additional insights that an autobiographical narration can throw since the added advantage of the self in such writings is that it gets to play the dual role of the narrator as well as the actor in the narrative? In the course of examining the narrative self, we will also see how

¹ While the two terms, i.e., “self” and “person” are not always identically understood and thus used separately. Self as such can refer to a being who is conscious and in that sense one can talk even of a minimal self. But when it come to a person, we talk of one who is not just conscious but has the capacity to self-reflect. But here I use the term self and person interchangeably because in talking of a narrative self we are talking of a self who is not just self - reflective but at the same time a moral being..

significant is the role of time in helping us understand the self as it shifts from its customary chronological representations of time to that of an existential representations marked by concern. Moreover, since a narrative is a construct that involves configuring a plot or a theme out of a series of events, it necessitates examining the role of imagination that plays an important role in this creative process of finding a concordance out of disparate events. Again, since narratives are teleological and oriented towards that which is good, it requires that they be grounded in morality. This nature of narratives calls for solutions that are creative in anticipating situations that challenges the existing code of conduct and so there is this need for narrative to engage with that which is known as moral imagination.

1. The Nature of Self

A. The Dilemma of Modern Notion of the Self

Talking about the nature of the self, generally a modern conception of self is characterized by two extreme polarities, the Cartesian – substantial self and the Humean – no self. This fallacious division explains for the seemingly impassible situation that philosophers find themselves in, a dilemma, where following the Cartesian Cogito, one ends up arguing either in favor of a substantial self or in arguing against it, denying the very existence of self itself. Understood from the Cartesian point of view, the self is an objective reality whose essence is discoverable and verifiable. However, the latter challenges the very idea of a core self that can be revealed in peeling away the layers. Apparently, this polarity seems to rule out other alternative possibilities, but on a careful analysis this stand is not true and does not reflect the actual state of affairs. On this account, philosophers themselves are to be held responsible for creating this unwarranted situation. The problem is as Berkley aptly puts, “they have first raised a dust and then complained that they cannot see.”²

To begin with, the issue that lay with the Cartesian or the foundational self is that, based on the act of thinking there is a sudden move to the conclusion that there is “a being that

² George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, ed. David R. Wilkins, 2002. Here right in the introduction of his book, part III Berkley in holding that the study of philosophy is to do with the search for wisdom and truth holds that part of the blame for the failure to reach them is not solely the fault with our faculty of senses themselves but more because we make a wrong use of them.

thinks.”³ This leap, from an act of thinking to the assertion that there is, therefore, a self that thinks is premised on the flawed metaphysical presupposition that without a substantial subject there cannot be activity of any sort. This clearly explains why the Cartesian self ends up with a substantial self that is impermeable for others. On the other end, Hume, in trying to figure out and in reply to this notion of a Substantial self went looking for a self that was simple, independent and unchangeable. In the process, the only substantialist supposition that he stumbled across, while in search for the self, was nothing other than a bundle of perceptible properties. Thus he wrote that:

“When I turn my reflexion on myself, I never can perceive this self without some one or more perceptions; nor can I ever perceive anything but the perceptions. ‘Tis the composition of these, therefore, which forms the self.”⁴

Now, on the nature of the self, juxtaposing the two standpoints, the question “Does the self exist?” seem to have no relevant factor that is worthy of pursuit and therefore any engagement with it seems futile. Any attempt to resolve the above question seems to result in a situation where we, in trying to deny one end of the dilemma, end up affirming the other end of the dilemma. However, on a careful analysis, despite these deep seated complications, going by past experiences as well as looking into the future expediencies of actions, questions over the existence of the self becomes admissibly inevitable and ineludible. To deny the existence of the self simply because there seems to be no alternative except to engage with a self that is immutable and so impermeable or a self so fluid that it is dismissed off as an illusion, commits us to a greater error.

Indeed, the inescapability of the significance of the self comes to the forefront, especially in those situations when the regular flow of events gets interrupted and one has to make decisions that would set on track the future course of action. At such juncture, it becomes inevitable that decision making, those at the individual level as well as those that involve others, cannot be made without referring to a self. Moreover, it would sound strange, if one is, following Hume, allowed to say in these circumstances that it is “the bundle of past perceptions” that is

³ According to the second Meditation, for Descartes, the self that we will find after we peel away the contingent layers, is a *res cogitans*. And this essential core of the “I,” though immaterial is a durable, indestructible kind of substance which can withstand the most negative, the most destructive thought.

⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed., Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 634.

making the choices. In such situations, narrative notion of the self in standing in-between the two extremes can be said to provide alternative ways and means of imagining possibilities. Here, the self, in revealing itself through its activities, provides possibilities and creates ways for actualizing these options and becomes the source of transformation.⁵

According to Ricoeur, the term narrative identity is located in between the cogito exalted by Descartes and forfeited by Nietzsche. He, in talking of the *idem* and *ipse* identity of the self, has argued all along that these are but two characteristics of a self which at the end is intimately interrelated. So, “what we call subjectivity is neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution.”⁶ It lies in between a self that in being sovereign is invulnerable and thus impermeable to the influence of others and a deconstructed self that in giving undue importance to the linguistic sources of the self either “engulfs, if not annihilates, the self.”⁷ Therefore, narrative turn arose at a time when the pressing demand is for an understanding of self that is able to integrate the modern interest with its concern for agency and the phenomenological demand with its concern for lived experiences, understood within the larger context of the society. Such a demand becomes feasible in narrative because what gives the self its agency is not because it is understood as an entity that is given once and for all but because it is seen as a construct that is in the process of making.

B. The Narrative Turn

On a narrative account, the notion of self as a substantial entity with a set of essential characteristics becomes insignificant. It repudiates the very idea of a core self that is fixed, single, objective and given, waiting to be unveiled. In opposition to the modern foundationalist notion of the self that sees the self as an objective reality, autonomous in itself, the self is understood rather as something that is created in the process and apprehensible in an infinite

⁵ Harlene Anderson, “Self: Narrative, Identity, and Agency” in *Conversation, Language, and Possibilities: A Postmodern Approach to Therapy* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 32.

⁷ Joseph Dunne, “Beyond Sovereignty and Deconstruction: The Storied Self,” in *Philosophical and social criticism*, 21 (1995), 140.

number of ways. Instead of subscribing to a reductionist view of self that is given the attempt is to “understanding how these givens, these meanings, emerge from human understanding.”⁸

Out of the many possible explanations that informs this interpretative turn, two distinct yet overlapping justification stands out. Firstly, a possibility as to the roots of this idea can be traced to the emergence of the notion that we are basically *homo Narrans* or storytelling creatures.⁹ Here, the self is understood in terms of our manifestation of action and in this case the action of telling stories about ourselves. We are always in the act of telling stories about who we are to ourselves as well as to others, stories which are again enclosed within other stories. The other explanation can be had in the form of the reasoning that the emergence of human’s interest in language and dialogue stems from the basis of the self as a social, dialogical process.¹⁰ Here, conversation with ourselves as well as with the significant others takes place as we are immersed and embodied in a relationship of creating meaning through conversation. Thus, narratives are never representative of a single isolated voice but as we are constituted in conversation with others we are seen as multi-authored self.

Consequently, in a narrative, far from seeing the self as a closed entity or a single being, it is seen as something that is in the process of being created. It is projected as a created narration, constructed linguistically and existing in a dialogue with the others.¹¹ Narrative engagement thus refers to the form of discourse that reflects the way we compose our lives. In contrast to the reductionist view of a core self that is discoverable in peeling away the layers, the self here is primarily seen as a construct, following different instances of experiences and multiple narratives. Hence, the self is often described as a dialogical-narrative self.¹² The outcome of such a dialogue is thus not the stable and enduring entity, limited and fixed in a geographical place or time. The self here reflects the steadfastness of an ongoing narrative and is not reducible to the sum total of experiences and identity, nor is it modeled on some kind of

⁸Anderson, “*Self*,” 212.

⁹Roy Schafer, *Language and Insight* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978),

¹⁰ Anderson, “*Self*,” 222

¹¹ Taylor, 1989, Bruner, 1986; Gadamer, 1975; Gergen, 1989; Rorty, 1979,.

¹² Taylor for instance in his book *Sources of the self* p.35, writes that, “My self-definition is understood as an answer to the question Who am I. And this question finds its original sense in the interchange of speakers. I define who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining relations are lived out.”

psychological continuity or discontinuity of selfhood. It is the outcome of a dialogical event that occurs “outside” the self. So, rather than falling on to a fixed and rigid way of looking at the self, the identities of the self is structured in relation to the discourse, guided by the purpose we have and so it is read, described and understood in multifarious ways.

In a narrative, our understanding of human nature and behavior is determined by the descriptions that we use, the vocabularies that we employ and the stories that we tell. So, the use of metaphor goes beyond the simple act of storytelling. It is reflective of the discursive way in which we engage with our experiences. Narrative is for this reason referred to as a dynamic process. Narrative intelligence is responsible for giving structure and coherence to the disparate and fragmented events in our life. The investment of a structure and coherence to our life creates and recreates things, including ourselves and infuses a sense of meaning to the experiences of our lives and in the process shapes our self-identities.¹³ So, the stories that are told, form, inform, and re-form our sources of knowledge and shape our views of reality in relation to the others.

In a narrative, our engagement with the world is not carried out in terms of event by event or sentence by sentence as is with the case of the text. What we are dealing with is “the vicissitudes of human intention.”¹⁴ The frame our experiences is governed and understood in terms of a “narrative mode of thought” that provides an interpretive context for the components they encompass.¹⁵ Therefore, Ricoeur, in observing this process of narrative, holds that the practical wisdom of narrative lies in its competence to redescribe reality, by combining things scattered in time and space into a sort of coherent pattern. This “makes productive the paradoxes that disquieted Augustine to the point of reducing him to silence.”¹⁶

Another important feature of narratives is that they are not accomplished facts but discursive practices that are characterized by a state of continuous evolution and change. In the process of being made and remade, narrative engagement employs a two-way reflexive process that adds to the way we create alternatives and enriches our way of imagining possibilities. In

¹³ Anderson, “Self,” 213

¹⁴ Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 64

¹⁶ Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative,” 68. Ricoeur relates back this practice of productive synthesis in particular to the notions of emplotment (*muthos*) and representation as 'imitation of action' (*mimesis*) to Aristotle's *Poetics*.

narratives, while our experiences are said to be constructed out of the very act of organizing and attributing meaning to our stories, this act of organizing is in turn used to understand further our experiences.¹⁷ In the process, meaning and action cannot be separated and are not to be understood in terms of causal relationship as they are said to be more reflexive in nature.¹⁸ Thus, narrative as the source of transformation of the self is said to become the person or persons our stories demand.¹⁹

Narratives, as we have been discussing all along are shared experiences resulting either from the self's conversation with himself or herself and in interaction with the others. The stories of our life and the meaning thereof are constructed and reflective of the way we see and perceive the world in our everyday engagement with the world that surrounds us. This act of organizing our experiences narratively, according to Bruner is something that we acquire early in and through our childhood experiences, of hearing and learning to recount the stories that we hear. This reflects the discursive ways we employ to construct meanings, while trying to understand ourselves in relation with others. Accordingly, narrative identity involves recounting the story of one's life in reply to the question "who is the author or the agent?" The story narrated is about the plans and actions of the person who endures throughout the play of diverse acts and commitments, starting from birth till death.

However, this exercise of meaning construction is a schema located within the broader contexts of culturally driven rules and conventions.²⁰ In the process it has been observed that though the ongoing story is about a self, designated by a proper name, yet as far as the natural progression of the story is concerned it is intersubjective, it involves someone saying or doing something to the other.²¹ This is attested by the fact that in normal cases no one tells a story to himself or herself except in those cases where one is speaking to his or her alter-ego. Building a cohesive story out of one's life in the light of new and old stories that encompasses the past, the

¹⁷ Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," 68.

¹⁸ In doing so, language serves as the means of construction and so to the extent that we accept the role of language one can more or less agree here that the limits of our language can restrict what can be expressed about our narrative structures and stories and, thus, our futures.

¹⁹ Kenneth J Gergen, *Realities and Relationship: Soundings in Social Constructions* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University press 1994).

²⁰ Anderson, "Self," 213

²¹ Richard Kearney and James Williams, "Narrative and Ethics," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, no. 70 (1996): pp. 29-45, 47-61

present and the future cannot be possibly undertaken or understood except in a context that is intersubjective. This becomes more evident in Proust's assertion that one cannot become a reader or a writer of one's life unless one become the reader and writer of other's life.²²

C. The Intersubjectivity of the Self

Narrative identity as mentioned earlier is invariably intersubjective, it involves a life that is woven of stories heard and told. The Stories of our birth, to begin with, are someone else's stories which will be continued by someone else after our own death. The identity of the self is created in the process between one's moment of birth and death, largely, in receiving the narrative of the others and renarrating itself in turn to others. And this narrative model of identity that talks about the inter-subjective of the self has been attested and developed by a number of contemporary thinkers starting from Ricoeur and MacIntyre to Taylor, and Nussbaum.²³ And despite their differences, as to what and how this narrative model is constructed, all are in agreement that the Cartesian substance-like self, which results from a metaphysical illusion, fails to take into account this narrative process of socialization.

In projecting a narrative onto a world of which one is both a creative agent and a receptive actor, the importance of human narrative, according to MacIntyre is such that a reply to the question "What am I to do?" can be answered only if one response to the question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" The reason behind this is "because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others."²⁴ Nussbaum also holds that narratives provide us with, "the ability to be an intelligent reader of another person's story."²⁵ She sees narrative equipped with its imaginative power as creating a space where we can combine the use of imagination with knowledge and actual experience in

²² This is a concept which Kearney borrows from Proust while taking of how narratives can enable each one of us to relate to the other as another self and to oneself as another.

²³ Similarly, the postmodernist Lyotard (1984) while holds that narratives constitute our "social bonds." At the same time, he is also against the idea of seeing metanarrative as privileged and oppressing, especially when it comes to grand social theory narratives.

²⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Indian : University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 212.

²⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 390.

order to overcome the limitations of our own narrow world-views and “venture beyond our local settings”²⁶

Toward this aim, our stories are again temporally organized, with beginnings, middles, and ends that correspond to the past, present, and future. The stories are always situated in a history which makes intelligible those changes that happen over time in our lives.²⁷ We share ourselves and our lives with others by assembling the bits and pieces of our narratives, connected in sequential fashion and intertwine over time, into viable storied versions influenced by memory, context, and intention. Gergen in talking about narrative intelligibility holds that they are the “forms of intelligibility that furnish accounts of events across time. Individual actions ... gain their significance from the way in which they are embedded within the narrative.”²⁸

These ongoing narratives of “who we are” are embedded within and intertwined with both self- and other-stories narratives. So taking into account both our local as well as common histories, we are at best, nothing other than or more than one of the multiauthors of a continually changing narrative that becomes our self. In the same manner, it has been observed that a person’s life is not a static narrative with one plot but a “dynamic mosaic” of different narrative plots.²⁹ The self is always an engaged ongoing multifaceted biography of self-other engagement that is in the process of being constantly written and rewritten. Self, therefore, is in this sense is understood as a conversational becoming, created and recreated through constant interactions, and inter relationships.³⁰ Therefore, it is said that we live our narratives and our narratives become our living; our realities become our stories and our stories become our realities.

If this is true that knowing who we are can be answered successfully to an extent in presenting a story, one may following this framework be faced with several related questions. To put it simply, what are identities made of, where and when do identities start? Now, accordingly, when one is constructing an identity of the self in narration, should the story encompass the whole of our lived experiences or will it consist only of those selective memories that are

²⁶ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating humanity; A Classical Defence of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 14.

²⁷ Anderson, “Self,” 214.

²⁸ Gergen, *Realities and Relationship*, 224.

²⁹ Morny Joy, “Feminism and the Self,” *Theory and psychology* 3, no. 3 (1993):296-297.

³⁰ Anderson & Goolishian, 1988a; Goolishian & Anderson, 1994.

regarded as significant enough to fit into our life? Will it consist only of events that have some life changing effects and have in the process defined or redefined a sense of who-we-are now? If narration involves a selective telling of events, how is one to in the act of choosing going to decide how these events count as significant to the self? How will these events be linked up with other events in constructing a story that is responsible for creating a particular story that is different from the discourse of everyday life and is yet reflective of the self? Moreover, why at all, do we primarily have to in making sense of who we are rely on seriated events of happenings that constitute a story? Or why should narration be considered a privileged genre for identity constructions?

Any attempt to response to these questions will takes us through the process of engagement, with the act of narrating a story that involves both the process of differentiation and integration of a sense of self fashioned along different social and personal dimensions. And in the process any claim of identity is generally faced with the three dilemmas of:³¹ (i) a sense of sameness of self across time in the face of constant change; (ii) uniqueness of the person vis-à-vis others in the face of being the same as everyone else; and (iii) the making of agency as constituted by self and world. Here narrating, as a speech activity that makes the ordering of characters in space and time possible is not to be understood or reduced to a mental or linguistic schemata located inside the mind, but rather as a process not fixed and open to change, depending on the context and function.³²

A construction in narrative is not necessarily bound by previously held positions, convictions, or beliefs, but is open to negotiation. Though the act of narrating is firmly grounded in “talk”, yet as a kind of multimodal engagement, it is best characterized as “embodied talk.” Unlike the traditional accounts of time that allows little or no room for ambiguity or boundary transgression, narrative with its openness for fictitious time and space can open up avenues for discovery of novel identities. In addressing questions of identity formation, narratives allow room with spaces to transgress traditional boundaries and test out novel identities.

³¹ Michael Bamberg, “Who am I? Narration and its contribution to self and identity” *Theory and Psychology* 21(1) 1 –22.

³² However, this does not imply, as Bruner) cautions, that the mind is “locked up inside one person’s subjectivity, ... hermetically sealed off”. (1991, p. 76

Finally, when the ordering of events of the story in time and space is done following a quasi-causal and non-teleological sequence then the act of narration can be said to adopt a scientific approach. However, narration goes beyond this outlook, the events are said to gain their meaning quasi-retrospectively, owing to the overarching contour in which they configure in the story. This is when narrative can be said to adopt a plot-governed Hermeneutical approach. It enables narrative to draw closer the referential parts of its narrating activities and at the same time derive its capacities of drawing toward its elements of “human life.” Thus, according to Taylor, it is this hermeneutical approach that allows narrative to capture something more than what is reportable or tellable, allowing it to reflect life and a sense of liveworthiness.³³ In allowing the self to function as a character, vis-à-vis, its past, narrative enables the self to disassociate himself or herself from its place of being the one who is telling the story, and occupy a reflective stand. Eventually, this function makes narrative to potentially orient itself towards an imagined “*human good*.”

2. Authenticity

A. Being True to Oneself

In contrast to the standard brands of Enlightenment ethics such as utilitarianism that highlighted the content or Kantianism that stressed on rules or form, existential ethics seems to be primarily concerned with who gets to tell the story.³⁴ More specifically, the expressivist’s imperative is that everyone gets to tell his or her own story and has been thus described as an ethics of voice. In the light of this understanding we will briefly outline how conceptualizing authenticity in terms of a narrative function takes into consideration a commitment to one’s system of self-values that has implications for identity theory.

With the transition of the idea of self from modern to post modern and the subsequent emergence of the notion that self reflects society and society the self, a lot of interest has been generated over the question of authenticity. Concerns over the loss of authenticity, the “real me,” has become widespread though with varying effects. Primarily, a sense of authenticity is

³³Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

³⁴Hilde Nelson, ed. *Stories and Their Limits: Narrative Approaches to Bioethics* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 80.

understood as the person's specific reference to self-values and the degree to which one fulfills the expectations or commitments one has for himself or herself when a self-referential problem arises.³⁵ Put in simple words, the term authenticity describes a person as one who acts in ways that are considered as being faithful and reflective of himself or herself.

This notion is different even from that of the question of autonomy in the sense that the reasons and the motives on which an authentic person acts are not just unconstrained but involve a "language of personal resonance."³⁶ Now, the question is how are we to conceptualize this kind of a self that can be meaningful while simultaneously being accommodative of the purported effects of the external factors of life? Perhaps a possible solution would be to adopt an empirical orientation that would capture a sense of self that is both multi-dimensional and unified, emotional as well as cognitive, uniquely individual and at the same time intimately connected to the society. Consequently, the concern here is no longer with questions of "being true to *self*" for all time, but rather with questions that concern talks of being true to self-in-context or true to self-in-relationship.

In recent philosophical discourses, the concept of authenticity, as an ideal gained popularity after the Second World War, especially following the works of Heidegger and Sartre.³⁷ The formation of the concept can be traced back to Heidegger. A literal translation of the word *Eigentlichkeit*, gives a sense of "owning up to and owning what one is and does." Applying this conception of authenticity to the question of what it is to be a human being, Heidegger in *Time and Being* writes that *Dasein* is not a kind of object among others, rather it is a "relation of being."³⁸ The self is described as a being that "care" about who and what we are and for whom the being is always *at issue*. The self is realized in the choices we make and understood in the roles we enact. He holds that failure to make these choices in our "average everydayness of life" and act on them makes us become one with the "herd" or "crowd."³⁹

³⁵ George Herbert Mead, "The Social Self," in *Selected Writings: George Herbert Mead*, ed. A. Reck. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964), 142-149.

³⁶ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 90.

³⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 475.

³⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being And Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 121.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

Taking into cognizance the genealogy of authenticity, as far as the period of the early romantics, Taylor also describes the moral ideal of authenticity as “being true to oneself.” The ideal of authenticity, he holds, is based on the notion that there is “a certain way of being human that is *my way*.”⁴⁰ This process of self-creation and self-expression requires that rather than passively carrying out a set of internal directions or an externally prescribed plan of life one heeds to the inner voice that is responsible for crafting a distinctive identity for oneself.⁴¹ The real meaning and realization of life comes from discovering and being faithful to this “true” self or else one risk the consequences of becoming a hollow man, the untoward product of external social forces.

Taylor argues that the attempt to find meaning in a way of life that is expressive of one's individuality presupposes certain attributes, actions, and achievements that matters more than others. In deciding what are the things that matters most he comes up with two criteria that helps define our actions. Firstly, for any activity to be meaningful there exist a “horizons of significance.” It is only against this horizon that particular actions and affirmations do stand out as substantial bases of human identity. Taylor refutes such descriptions of authenticity as “facile relativism” with everyone having his or her own “values.” Defining an identity for oneself is not as trivial as it is made to be and can happen only against a backdrop of factors that matter and count. This involves taking into consideration factors such as history, the demands of nature, the needs of one's fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of a god, etc.⁴² Bracketing them out would amount to eliminating things that matters. Rather authenticity presupposes such demands, demands that emanate from beyond the self as these are values that authenticity in itself is not alien to nor against. Thus, Taylor's assertion is that personal authenticity is not, strictly speaking, personal at all, it is a dialogical achievement.⁴³

The second factor that comes into play is the need for “recognition” or esteem for being the particular individuals. As has been discussed above, the level of successful orientation towards these “things that matter” also depends on an on-going dialogical recognition from others. Redefining the conventional view of authenticity, being authentic involves the need to

⁴⁰ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 28-29.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13, 41.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 33-35; Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”*: An Essay (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 32-35.

orient our focus on matters that are beyond oneself, such as the concerns of society, nature, and so on. True that recognition from others does not guarantee the authenticity of one's life as we cannot basically let others decide what matters for us. Yet, at the same time, authenticity cannot be achieved in the absence of such recognition as one cannot, while deciding upon things that matter, ignore what are those things or qualities that matters for the others.⁴⁴ Thus recognition forms a necessary though not a sufficient condition for authenticity. Taylor holds that it is only in such a dialogical pursuit of authenticity that we get a picture of what a better or higher mode of life consists in. It provides a kind of moral ideal where the implication of the terms "better" and "higher" are to be understood not in terms of what we desire or need, but has to be understood in terms of what we ought to desire.⁴⁵

B. Authenticity as Reciprocity

In addition, Taylor also goes further in holding that rightly understood, the ideal of authenticity with its claims of individual freedom does not at the same time allow us to escape from the constraints imposed on us by our obligations to other.⁴⁶ Given that the self is constituted dialogically, Taylor contends that the construction of a particular identity also needs to proceed expressively. It is true that to live authentically, we must give "expression in our speech and action to what is original in us"⁴⁷ as failure to do so would result in succumbing to an other-directed life of inauthenticity. However, it is not enough to listen to one's inner voice or to strive to live in contentment with one's own set of self-defined values and achievements alone. As pointed out, the ideal of authenticity itself requires that there be certain standards on the basis of which things are to be worked out in action. In this sense, we are dependent on others for making feasible what Rousseau calls our "moral" development, i.e., the whole range of intellectual and emotional developments that a cultivated mind makes possible. Experiences of this kind of dependence on others are said to have given rise to the realization of the need for a demand for recognition.

⁴⁴ Antonio Casado da Rocha, "'Live Thus Deliberately': Authenticity and Narrative Ethics in 'Walden'" in *The Concord Saunterer*, New Series, no. 12/13 (2004/2005): 314.

⁴⁵ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 15-16.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 35-41.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

Instead, being authentic or being faithful to ourselves requires an infinite orientation toward what is beyond oneself, and calls for a commitment to some higher values. It involves being truthful to something which was produced in collaboration with a lot of other people, to “the infinite extent of our relations.”⁴⁸ And Authenticity in this case is embedded in narrative. There are many for whom this whole exercise of self-fulfillment, of finding one’s own course of life is suspect and so it is either seen as something nonsensical or a vehicle of self indulgence. However Taylor observes that talks of authenticity as something “vague and woolly” hold true only when one views it from “a hard-line, scientific attitude to the world” approach. Another objection to authenticity is that it is “an expression of moral laxity, or at least as reflecting simply a loss of the more stringent ideals formerly dominant in our culture.”⁴⁹ Critics such as Allan Bloom, for instance, argue that any talk of authenticity is a symptom of our decadent culture, which ultimately leads to anarchy.

However, Ricoeur in the conclusion of “Time and Narrative,” holds that the self of self-knowledge is not to be equated with the egotistical and narcissistic ego whose hypocrisy and naivety the hermeneutics of suspicion have denounced. The self of “self-knowledge is the fruit of an examined life.”⁵⁰ MacIntyre also likewise holds that while man is, in his conducts and actions essentially a story-telling animal, the key concern for him or her is not about his or her own authorship. For him man is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. So an answer to the question “What am I to do” can be answered only if the earlier question “Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?” is taken care of.⁵¹

Identity as Ricoeur implies is “neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution. This is precisely the sort of identity which narrative composition alone can create through its dynamism.”⁵² Ricoeur in vouching for an alternate viewpoint that lies between a sovereign self, impenetrable to the influence of others and, a deconstructed self having its base in the linguistic sources of the self, pushes for a narrated self.

⁴⁸ Henry Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), 171.

⁴⁹ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 74-75.

⁵⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1988), 247.

⁵¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 211.

⁵² Paul Ricoeur, *From text to Action: Essay in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University press, 1991), 32.

Thus, if this is the kind of identity that we aim for in narrative then the subsequent question that follows this is how is one to qualify this self? What are its constituents?

This kind of understanding of identity seems to suggest two important characteristics of the self. First, the self that is seen as fluid and multidimensional has its basis in the constructivists' notion of social organization. However, while it is true that narrative identities are constructed inter-subjectively, sustained and reconfigured through the functioning of social relationships, narratives also include a mediation between man and himself or self-understanding and a mediation between man and the world.⁵³ Secondly, while one cannot help agreeing with the critics on the problems posed by a Cartesian immutable substance that puts a limit on the study of the self yet a rejection of these philosophical frameworks does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the idea of the self is simply an illusion or does not matter. A theory of narrative identity works out this point in detail. Here, the self is more than an illusion, it is “neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality”⁵⁴ but an examined life that is recounted in form of the story we tell.

Narrative identities are very much in process and incomplete, constantly being made and remade as events occur. They are essentially procedural because they articulate lived time and are reflective of an ongoing project. Owing to the disordered nature of life, self-narratives often appear confused and chaotic and as a result one is not sure how the story will end.⁵⁵ This does not mean they do not have a plot or a scheme but it is more to do with the fact that the process of life is not simple, clear, or articulated as it is in a fiction. Narrative identity as such is coherent, fluid and changeable and though it is historically grounded but “fictively” reinterpreted. It is constructed by an individual but constructed in conjunction and in conversation with other people. In this way, the concept of a narrative identity makes clear the central issues both of the relationship between history and fiction and of the temporal nature of the self-concept.⁵⁶ This

⁵³ Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation* eds. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 27.

⁵⁴ Ricoeur, *Text to Action: Essay in Hermeneutics II*. trans. by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University press, 1991), 32.

⁵⁵ David Carr, “Narrative Explanation and Its Malcontents” in *History and Theory*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2008), 19-30

⁵⁶ In fact, Ricoeur approaches the question of narrativity through a detour of the literary forms of Narrative. The justification for these is because fictional narratives in dealing with issues of coherence, of permanence in time, in short, problems of identity, take us to a new level of lucidity which often not dealt in the stories in which the course of life is immersed.

serves to reassert what Ricoeur describes of the self as something that is not fixed, not structured or immovable, but an ongoing dialogue and the creation of that ongoing integrative process.⁵⁷

C. Authenticity and the Good

To be a self is to find oneself making continuous attempt to make sense of our lives, a meaning in the pattern of life. However, attempts in this direction cannot be adequately accounted for merely in terms of pragmatic considerations, it also calls for a commitment towards that which is good. Indeed, over the last few decades, it is in the context of the relationships between self, its self-reflexive modes of inquiry, the others and the community, informed by the social, political and historical dynamics that the emergence of the narrative turn can be traced.⁵⁸ Thus, construction of self identity is necessarily dialogical and relational, it involves continuously challenging and confirming each other's positions. It also includes orienting oneself in a moral sphere in relation to questions that inescapably pre-exists for us, taking into accounts factors that results from one's choosing or accidents of history.

The growing popularity of narratives is partly due to the growing dissatisfaction with the positivist approach which in trying to understand human nature in relation to the world places the observer or researcher of social phenomena outside the social reality.⁵⁹ The problem with this kind of approach lies in its failure to recognize that social reality as a phenomenon does not exist simply "out there" in the objective world. It is rather a very complex network that results from socially and historically mediated human consciousness. The merit of Narratives lies in that as it "unfold the depth and complexity of human experience, power and other social dynamics" it help us gain insights into the lived experience of individuals and the society.⁶⁰

Life history is essentially a collaborative and reciprocal process, where one is engaged in the co-construction of meaning. It is in such circumstances that narrative gain significance as it

⁵⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 1, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1988), 48.

⁵⁸ Giddens, 1991; Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*.

⁵⁹ Polkinghorne, "Narrative Knowing and The Human Sciences," (Albany: Albany State University of New York Press, 1988)

⁶⁰ Ken Plummer, *Documents of life 2: An invitation to a critical humanism* (London: Sage Publications, 2001).

“can thematize action, so it can be the bridge to ethical life.”⁶¹ Ricoeur in explaining the question of what constitutes a “good life” contends that narrative get its meaning and involves a search for the meaning of good or otherwise, through its relationship to the “other” who summons the self to responsibility.⁶² He further notes that “this dialogic structure, in its turn, remains incomplete outside of the reference to just institutions.”⁶³ This aspect of self is elucidated more clearly in Goffman when he in expounding that behind each self there is an institutional system, writes that

The self, then, can be seen as something that resides in the arrangements prevailing in a social system for its members. The self in this sense is not a property of the person to whom it is attributed, but dwells rather in the pattern of social control that is exerted in connexion with the person by him- self and those around him.⁶⁴

The attempt to come up with a credible version of authenticity is beset with many challenges, the basic problem being rooted in concerns over questions of self-perception. An important area of concern is with the question, whether a person in the process of constructing identity through life stories can enjoy maximum freedom to construct as he or she pleases, as this increases the risk of constructing a false identity? In addition to this, questions can be raised as to what are the criteria required for such a demanding task that is intended to check the possible misconstruction of the self’s identity? What makes the ethics of authenticity prone to deviate into the trivial of self centered egoism? This question is not to be confused with the typical criticism of social constructivism in that the self and the world are perceived through their interaction with each other. This is a fundamentally philosophical question that has really challenged the act of narration as it involves an act of selective configuration.

3. Autobiography as Narratives

A. Writing the Self

Narratives as we have seen are not simple chronological accounts but accounts that give coherence or shape to events. As a matter of fact in the process of recounting our experiences,

⁶¹ David Rasmussen, “Rethinking subjectivity: Narrative identity and the Self” in *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, ed. Richard Kearney (London: Sage Publications 1995), 166.

⁶² Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1992), 187.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 172.

⁶⁴ Ervin Goffman, *Asylums: Essay on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 154.

while giving coherence or shape to events, we embellish our stories. Hence, narratives are fraught with interpretation, motivations and alterations and so they often conflict. Autobiography, like all other literary forms of narratives, seeks the effect of fiction and is what a gifted writer makes of it. Thus, even when it wears the mask of sincerity and tries to pass itself off as something to be the absolute truth, it can be as fictional as the wildest fantasy.

Northrop Frye, for instance, classified autobiography as a “form which merges with the novel by insensible gradations. Most autobiographies are inspired by a creative, and therefore fictional, impulse, to select only those events and experiences in the writer's life that go to build up an integrated pattern.”⁶⁵ James Olney too, went on to define autobiography as an order of “ideal act” that realizes “Symbolic Man.”⁶⁶ Paul John Eakin, describes autobiography as “a mode of self-invention that is always practiced first in living.” So, the self around which the autobiographical narrative is constructed is necessarily seen as a fictive structure. Indeed, narrative is itself “an experiential category.”⁶⁷

However, the differences between fiction and autobiography-as-narrative are not to be understood as differences between innovation and truth or between the imaginative and the factual, for on a careful examination imagination can be said to be present in everything that is well thought of and written. Interestingly the “creative” stamp, the distinctive imaginative organization of experience in autobiography, is supplied not by intention but by the felt relation to the life data themselves.⁶⁸ So what distinguishes autobiography and sets it apart from other writings is its subject, who is none other than the individual concerned. Autobiography in this sense is properly a history of the self and its concern is with the self as a character. Following this observation, Elizabeth Bruss for instance remarks that one of the regulations that define the writing of autobiography is as follows:

⁶⁵ Frye, Northrop, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) 307.

⁶⁶James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 318.

⁶⁷Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

⁶⁸ Alfred Kazin, “Autobiography as Narrative,” in *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, 212.

An autobiographer undertakes a dual role. He is the source of the subject matter and the source of the structure to be found in his text. . . . The existence of this individual, independent of the text itself, is assumed to be susceptible to appropriate verification procedures.⁶⁹

Numerous philosophers have made notable observations about the importance and inevitability of autobiography in addressing the question of self. Nietzsche, for instance writes that, “every great philosophy so far has been ... the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir.”⁷⁰ Jean Starobinski holds that autobiography cannot help being true as “No matter how doubtful the facts related, the text will at least present an authentic image of the man who ‘held the pen’”⁷¹ Thus, the autobiographer is not only a figure of writing, like the character of a novel. He is also a person doing something rhetorically in ongoing present time.⁷² So autobiography as a narrative account of an individual’s own personal experience has generated great interest and debates. Thus, Kazin writes that:

This is also its aesthetic dilemma, on which contemporary fiction is often hung up; for autobiography deals with a case history, not with plot; with portraits, not with characters; it fixes the relation between the artist and the world, and so fixes our idea of the world instead of representing it to us as a moving, transforming power.⁷³

Therefore, if the above claims are true then it gives rise to a number of questions. Firstly, since the autobiographical accounts are by nature rife with a sea of individual experiences and standpoints, full of irresolvable inconsistency, contestability, and discrepancies, what possibly can be taken to be the starting ground for someone to be critical of those accounts of what I have experienced? Again, if life, is as argued by the narrativists, a storied account and each person his own author, the second set of problems concerning self-authorship lies with drawing a division

⁶⁹ Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 10.

⁷⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 13.

⁷¹ Jean Starobinski, “The Style of Autobiography,” in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 75.

⁷² David J. Gordon, “Character and Self in Autobiography,” in *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Spring, 1988), 110.

⁷³ Alfred Kazin, “Autobiography as Narrative” *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol 3, No 4. 216.

between the person as the narrator and his life as the participant. This concern stems from the fact that a relationship between a person and his or her life is much more intimate than the relationship that exists between an author and the written story, as in case of the former, both are one and the same person. This gives rise to the question about the extent to which one can be successful in distinguishing the identity between self as the narrator and self as the actor. Where and when can we draw the line of distinction between the two? Moreover, in conjunction to the problem of distinction, how are we to decide when and where the two are to come together or to fall apart?

In reply to such queries, moral theorists are divided on how to tackle the issue. Generally, some of the moral theorists are of the view that deciding what is right or wrong is largely a question of rational inquiry as against the opposing view which holds that it makes no sense to consider of ethical reflections as a rational exercise as the question of objectivity in ethics does not arise. Those who are in support of morality as involving a rational discourse argue that any appeal to subjective experience must therefore be removed from moral discussions whereas the latter group argues that moral discourse are made of such stuff and cannot be objective. Perhaps a way of steering clear of this dilemma in our ethical deliberations would be to take into consideration subjective experiences while aiming at rational beliefs. Thus, taking a cue from what is suggested here we intent to argue out in the process of this work that narratives themselves are reasons structured and might play a legitimate and essential role in ethics.

B. Autobiographical narratives and its Experiential and Ethical Groundings

Primarily, beliefs in order to be justified needs to be responsive to experience. According to C. S. Peirce, experience is that brute force that impinges upon us.⁷⁴ It is the tribunal against which beliefs are attested, but it does not give us access to a truth unclothed by human cognitive capacities and interests. In this sense, everything that we experience are interpreted and the experiential data that we possess are not raw experiences but rather beliefs about what we experienced.⁷⁵ So taking into consideration that at least some of our ethical judgments legitimately aspire to getting matters right we must take our ethical judgments to be responsive

⁷⁴ Charles S. Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vols. 1–6, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, vols. 7 and 8 ed. Arthur W. Burks (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap, 1931–58).

⁷⁵ Cheryl Misak, “Experience, Narrative, and Ethical Deliberation,” *Ethics* 118, no. 4 (July 2008): 614-632, 620.

to experience. The objective here is to examine if autobiographical narrative, that involves recounting one's own experience can provide us with an opportunity to explore the point to which the business of ethics is an experience-driven inquiry.

Ethical discussions do start with experience and their reactions to them but in ethics our concern is not on the reactions per se but on the evaluative judgments about the appropriateness of those reactions.⁷⁶ And it is in reflecting upon and describing those experiences which embody moral responses that we can gain epistemic access to values or norms.⁷⁷ In case of reporting, in ordinary narratives, the narrator can either position herself in the shoes of the participant or as a narrator interpret and evaluate the event while inviting the listener to respond to the event. However, in case of autobiography, unlike the other forms of narrative, it has the added advantage where the perspective of a participant as well as that of a narrator can either be combined into one or they can fall apart depending on how one chooses to narrate.

An example of autobiography where the self as a narrator and a participant of the story falls apart can be shown here as discussed by Cheryl Misak.⁷⁸ This illustration is based on her own experience with sickness in and her observations regarding the patient's autonomy that is based on the rationality of competency. Basically, in medical care, in support of the patient's autonomy the suggestion is that one should respect the critically ill patient's "subjective position." This principle is based on the argument that in case of decision making it is important to take into account the stories about how things are for the point of the patients. However, she observes that when it comes to making life saving decisions it is altogether another question and situation. For looking back on her experiences and the fact that the doctors took her decisions into confidence that concerns her health she recalls that she was far less that competent at that time to make the right choice concerning her health. And so she concludes that when things are critical for the patients, we ought to treat them paternalistically. In looking back as an external narrator of her own experiences she found herself arguing, against her own internal participant point of view at that time. Thus this example shows how the position of the self in an

⁷⁶ Misak, "Experience, Narrative and Ethical Deliberation," 623.

⁷⁷ In this case though the person in focus has a 'privilege' of having the experiences and these experiences in themselves cannot easily be replicated by others yet this does not qualify it as a privileged access.

⁷⁸ Misak, "Experience, Narrative and Ethical Deliberation," 615.

autobiography is precarious yet provides a rich field of experience to be able to judge at the same time from two different points as a narrator and as a participant.

The example discussed above shows that there are two possible ways in which the recounting of experience can happen in autobiographical narrative, ways in which our ethical beliefs can be answerable. First, we can test our beliefs about the experiences of others against the account of those who have actually undergone the experience themselves. Secondly, we can test our moral principles against the moral insights of those who have had relevant and distinctive experiences.⁷⁹

Knowing well the advantages an autobiographical account has to offer and taking into consideration the fact that ethics in itself is experience driven, one can at this point of time raise the question, how far can an autobiographical account go in bringing us closer to the question “who am I”? What are the added advantages that having such a vantage point of view can grant us. It is important to note at this point that the kind of experience available to the self is so variable and so contestable that one cannot aim at getting things right. Our aim in moral deliberation, as Misak points out, is not to vote on what is right or wrong. Rather the exercise is to take moral insight, judgment, and argument on their own merits.⁸⁰ Thus, in our assessment of autobiographical narrative the measures that are adopted are those criteria that govern all theory choice—internal coherence, consistency along with other evidence, simplicity, explanatory power, and so on. So, whenever there is a conflict in narratives, one might explain away the conflict as resulting from reasons of overestimation, exclusion, self-deception, or for reasons such as one where the narrators has got things wrong. However, granted these conditions, in dealing with ethical issues our response to testimony as Paul Faulkner has aptly pointed out “is rationally sophisticated.”⁸¹

C. Self and the Other: Reciprocal Subjectivities

As it has been discussed above the aim of autobiography in its traditional sense is to make apparently clear the life of the historical self to the writing self. It is motivated by the desire on

⁷⁹ Misak, “Experience, Narrative, and Ethical Deliberation,” 626.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Paul Faulkner, “On the Rationality of Our Response to Testimony,” in *Synthese* 131 (2002), 353–70.

the part of the self to remember itself, a passion that drives narrative only for it to realize it is defeated in and by narrative.⁸² However, autobiography refers not only to a body of writing but to a practice that embraces the ethical imperative of the promise or pledge that precedes the self. James Olney, for instance, argued that bios can be understood as something other than the life lived and recounted in the written text. It involves “participation in an absolute existence far transcending the shifting, hanging unrealities of mundane life.” He, in distinguishing autobiography from historical writing, memoir, self-referentiality, and biography defines it as the genre of genres. He defined it as repetition, “the formal device of ‘recapitulation and recall.’”⁸³

For Derrida autobiography is a kind of act where the mirror in being shattered one finds himself or herself face to face with the other to whom he or she is responsible. He points out that confession is not the laying bare of the soul nor a recapitulation of the inner life but is a response, a promise to make truth, which, is a testimony to what is at once singular and universal.⁸⁴ He reserves the name “Autobiography” for this pledge to what remains outside, an other that makes deconstruction, possible. So it consists of a structure of writing and as an event or engagement wherein the self, which does not exist “is given by writing.”⁸⁵ Autobiography, for Derrida, is the compulsion to respond to an other, who is there before “I am.” So writing begins in an “external Provocation” and it is the presence of the other that puts autobiography into motion.

This comes out clearly when Derrida in reply to a question why all his writings are indexed to important references writes that,

There is always someone else, you know. The most private autobiography comes to terms with great transferential figures, who are themselves and themselves plus someone else (for example, Plato, Socrates, and a few others in *The Post Card*, Genet, Hegel, Saint Augustine, and many others in *Glas* or *Circumfession*, and so forth).⁸⁶

⁸² James Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 405-13.

⁸³ James Olney, “Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography,” in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 252.

⁸⁴ Joseph G. Kronick, “Philosophy as Autobiography: The Confessions of Jacques Derrida,” in *MLN, Comparative Literature Issue* Vol. 115, no. 5 (Dec., 2000), 998.

⁸⁵ Jacques Derrida, “‘A Madness’ Must Watch Over Thinking,” in *Points . . . Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber. trans. Peggy Kamuf and others (New York: Routledge, 1995), 347.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 353.

Here What Derrida is suggesting is that great texts of philosophy rather than construing a self-identical subject involve an expropriation of the self. And in this exercise it is the voices of others, dead or alive, traversing him whose otherness surprises him and provokes in him to write a text of his own.

Particularly, Derrida's autobiography is a response to Nietzsche's question that says, if you were given the chance to live this life as you live it now, once more and innumerable times, with nothing new in it, would you embrace this news with joy or would howl with terror?⁸⁷ Unlike Nietzsche for whom what the philosopher introduces is but a private vision presented as universal truth, for Derrida, philosophy is an act of self-accounting that "makes" truth. For him, there is a performative dimension to the recovery of self from self-alienation and the return to the one, who can be addressed as "I."⁸⁸ However, at the same time, this is different from the inner self that Augustine talks about, which is given by God. In Derrida, this autobiographical desire on the part of the self to gather up the memories and to keep a trace of the voices traversing him or her reflects the reliance of selfhood on something that is read, written and mentally recreated.⁸⁹

Autobiography can also be seen as a privileged literary genre that opens up a space for the exchange of experiences between self and the other.⁹⁰ The act of reading an autobiography can be reflective of a willingness to be open to the experiences of the other that are not just similar to mine but also to those that are potentially unfamiliar to me. In her lecture "*Mon experience d'ecrivain*," which roughly translates as "My writer's experience" Beauvoir in acknowledging that each human is the product of all human argues that literature can help mediate the gap between an individual's experience and the universal human predicament. In this sense, she holds that autobiography, unlike fiction, is not merely reflective of the contingencies and facticity of a singular existence but involves an identification of common experiences that takes place between the self and other. She holds that "In order for autobiography to be of interest, it

⁸⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), section 341.

⁸⁸ See Derrida, *Demeure*, 29-30.

⁸⁹ Joseph G. Kronick, "Philosophy as Autobiography: The Confessions of Jacques Derrida," in *MLN*, no. 115, No. 5, Comparative Literature Issue (Dec., 2000), 1010.

⁹⁰ In stressing the need for another Beauvoir holds that "A man entirely alone in the world would be paralyzed by the obvious realization of the futility of all his objectives; he probably would not be able to bear to be alive" (Beauvoir 1974b, 302)

must deal with experiences that concern a lot of people.”⁹¹ For Beauvoir just as the other gives the world to me, so is the self obligated to the other and to the otherness of history. In return, she points out that “the autobiographical subject lays herself open to the vicissitudes of history and is bound by the obligation to bear witness. This obligation exposes her contingent responses to history, which she is then obliged to assume.”⁹²

Thus, this notion of subjectivity in autobiography gives rise to several questions. One of them can be how the ethics of reciprocal intersubjectivity fits into the whole scheme of autobiography? How autobiography per se qualifies and functions ethically? And how in the process of constructing the self in an autobiographical narration can one keep away from the drawbacks of universalism and the folly of reducing the other to a kind of Self-sameness? How does one retain the authenticity of the self while making an appeal to the other?

4. Narrativity and Temporality

A. Chronological vs Existential Notion of Time

A notable feature of a narrative conception of the self is that there is an integrated sense of temporality. This characteristic feature of narrative comes out clearly in Ricoeur’s works, where narrative identity features as a special case in his reflection on the relationship between time and narrative. For him narratives result from the combined action of both historical events and interpretive imagination. It is shaped by the interplay between them. Fiction plays an important role in history in that retrospectively it helps free, “certain possibilities that were not actualized in the historical past”⁹³ So, what is fiction is quasi-historical and what is history is quasi-fictional.⁹⁴ This leads us to consider the position of temporality and the contribution it can make

⁹¹ Simone de Beauvoir “Mon experience d'ecrivain” in *Les Ecrits de*, ed. Claude Francis and Femande Gontier (Paris : Gallimard,1979), 450. This passage is as translated and quoted by Ursula Tidd, “The Self-Other Relation in Beauvoir’s Ethics and Autobiography” in *Hypatia*, Vol. 14, No. 4, The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir (Autumn, 1999), pp. 163-174.

⁹²Ursula Tidd, “The Self-Other Relation in Beauvoir's Ethics and Autobiography,” in *Hypatia*, Vol. 14, no. 4, The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir (Autumn, 1999), 171.

⁹³ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3. trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1988), 191.

⁹⁴In *Time and Narrative*, he focuses on the way history and fiction borrow from each other. For him history can be distinguished from fiction by its claim to refer to the "real" past. However, he also holds that without fictive imagination it is impossible to grasp the past (Ricoeur 1988, p. 5).

in the process of constructing a theory of the self, where the past and future course of events are continually configured and reconstituted, in the light of the “emergent” present.

This process of configuration and reconstitution involves combining and knitting together the objective events of the past, the effects of the past on the present, and the symbolic reconstruction of the past in the present. Ricoeur’s analysis of narrative goes beyond the semiotics of the text. His concern is with the hermeneutical aspect that takes into consideration not just the internal workings of the text but its relationship to a “prior and more originary” events of lived experience and this is where the notion of time becomes crucial.⁹⁵ That is to say, the “me” does not simply have a temporal aspect. These imagined responses constitutive of the role-taking process are either remembered or anticipated.

The emphasis on the actuality of historical lived experiences, of acting in the world, as the underlying principle to understand the interpretative process calls for an understanding of how the past and future are refigured in the present. Narrative for Ricoeur, involves an interface with the events of lived experience where lived experience are said to precede narrative, and narrative in turn shapes practical action.⁹⁶ This shows that “The alternation of telling and living is extended in time and ... constitutes a causal chain of sorts.”⁹⁷ This hermeneutic circle of narrative and action according to him involves a threefold process of prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration. Narrative imagination in providing a symbolic structure and temporal schema of action prefigures lived experience. These events are then configured into a story with the help of a central theme or plot that “mediates between the individual events or incidents and the story taken as a whole.”⁹⁸ This story, or text, then encounters lived experience again in terms of the world of the listener or reader who refigures the story as it influences his or her choices about how the story proceeds.

According to Ricoeur, narrative in interweaving historical events and the resources of fiction together fashions a plot within which events are interpreted. And it is through this quasi-

⁹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Vol. 1), trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1984), 53.

⁹⁶ (1984; 1985; 1988)

⁹⁷ George Rosenwald, 1992. “Conclusion: Reflection on Narrative Self-Understanding,” in *Storied Lives*, eds. G. Rosenwald and R. Ochberg. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 265-290

⁹⁸ (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (vol 1), 65.

fictive integrative process of emplotment that a sense of identity, or self-sameness, is constructed. Here, the remembered and anticipated events of a person's life become the person's life story. Our reading of narrative becomes hermeneutical to the extent that the self in interpreting the "objective" events of lived experience configures them in "subjective" narratives which in turn guide actions that refigured in narrative.

Narratives being integrally temporal are said to string together the events of the past, present, and future into a narrative whole. Narrating one's life introduces a sense of connectedness and temporal unity to a person's life. While narratives can and do reorganize and change, the sort of identity which narrative configuration alone can construct is not to be mistaken for the unchangeable substances or linguistic illusions. This aspect of self-continuity in identity and of self-consistency through life's changes is precisely a result of the dynamic nature of narrative. Thus, it has been observed that,

Narrative identity is coherent but fluid and changeable, historically grounded but "fictively" reinterpreted, constructed by an individual but constructed in interaction and dialogue with other people. In this way, the concept of a narrative identity clarifies the central issues both of the relationship between history and fiction and of the temporal nature of the self-concept, ...⁹⁹

Narrative identities are necessarily processual because they describe lived time. They are very much in-process, continuously made and remade as things unfold. And so they appear often appear disorganized and unfinished but this according to David Carr can be explained in terms of the disordered nature of life itself and understood as we are not sure how the story is going to end.¹⁰⁰

Ricoeur, in response to the problem of the "illusion of sequence," that results from a chronological arrangement of mechanical time, typically characteristic of a general understanding of time, provides for a more authentic reflection of time in terms of narrative. To begin with, for him, the relationship between narrativity and temporality is reciprocal.

⁹⁹) Joseph Dunne, "Beyond sovereignty and deconstruction: the storied self," in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21 (1995), 149

¹⁰⁰ David Carr, "Narrative Explanation and Its Malcontents," in *History and Theory*, Vol. 47, no. 1 (Feb., 2008), 19-30

Temporality constitutes a structure of existence that reaches to language in narrativity, on one hand and on the other, narrativity, has temporality as its ultimate referent.¹⁰¹ This way of looking at the relationship helps escape the dilemma of either subscribing to a chronology of sequence or the a-chronology model while trying to reach a deeper experience of time.

Taking a cue from Wittgenstein, Ricoeur compares the relationship between narrativity and temporality as one that holds between a language game and a form of life. He goes further in pointing out that the reason why narrative function and human experience of time, despite the shared reciprocity, are seen as counter to one another is because the temporal framework within which every narrative takes place primarily corresponds to the ordinary representation of time and is mistaken for it.¹⁰²

B. Within-timeness, Historicality and Recollection overlook

Time, understood in the ordinary sense of “nows,” as a linear succession of instants can be said to hide the true constitution of time. On a further analysis, there are different degrees of temporal organization and accordingly it has been divided into at least three levels.¹⁰³ The first temporal structure of time that is closest to the ordinary representation of time is the notion of time as “within-time-ness” or that “in” which events take place. However, owing to its datable, public, and measurable nature it is often confused with and leveled off with the ordinary notion of time. The next level involves the structure of “historicality.” The emphasis here is on the influence of the past, understood in terms of the ability to recover the “extension” between birth and death. This according to Ricoeur becomes obvious in works of “repetition” and is responsible for grounding objective history in historicality. Finally, one moves beyond historicality to the point where temporality springs forth in the plural unity of the future, past, and present. The appraisal of time here is built around the notion of care.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” in *Critical Inquiry* in Vol. 7, No. 1, On Narrative (Autumn, 1980), 169-190

¹⁰² This critique he said is equally applicable to Philosophers writing on time, who in failing to see the contribution of narrative to a critique of the concept of time ended up resorting to cosmology and physics to supply the meaning of time.

¹⁰³ While this division is made following division II of Heidegger's *Being and Time* Ricoeur intends to implement some changes taking into consideration a recourse to other philosopher like Aristotle and Augustine to Gadamer .

¹⁰⁴ Ricoeur, *Narrative Time*, 171.

This understanding of time in terms of the phenomenology of time experienced becomes more lucid understood in terms of the function of the “plot” in a narrative whereby successive events of the story are translated into an intelligible whole.¹⁰⁵ The way in which a plot develops, understood in terms of its ability to follow a story, forms a key factor which both the anti-narrativist epistemologists as well as literary critics have overlooked. However, a comprehension of the working of the plot helps configure the existential analysis of time.¹⁰⁶ It is the plot’s configuration function that explains for and places us at the point where temporality and narrativity are said to cross one another. Thus, for an event to qualify as significant component of a narrative it must be more than just a singular occurrence. It must be a “unique happening” which is determined by the way it contributes to the development of a plot.

In order to determine the above criteria Ricoeur holds that this becomes possible only when question of temporality is defined in terms of the description of things of our concern or our preoccupation. This happens when within-time-ness is understood in terms of the basic characteristics of care, to our concern in its existential constitution instead of referring to the external constituent. It is our preoccupation, the everyday mode of concern that takes our relationship with the objects of our concern out of the external domain. Therefore, being in time is something quite different from measuring intervals between limiting instants.¹⁰⁷ It involves making calculations or measuring time because we primarily have “to reckon with time.”

However, it is not the things of our concern in itself but our preoccupation of it that determines the sense of time. This enables us to talk of things as “having time to,” “taking time to,” or “wasting time.” Reckoning “with” time again has another implication where what is implied is that there is a right or a wrong “time to do.” As noted earlier, this within-time-ness is easily misunderstood in terms of the ordinary representation of time as something linear, a neutral series of abstract instants because our measurement of time is in the first place borrowed

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. For both the theory of history as well as the theory of fictional narratives the emphasis on nomological models and paradigmatic codes results in a trend that reduces the narrative component to the anecdotic surface of the story. Thus both seem to take it for granted that whenever there is time, it is always a time laid out chronologically, a linear time, defined by a succession of instants.

¹⁰⁷ Ricoeur, *Narrative Time*, 173. This level is defined by one of the basic characteristics of care – our thrownness among things – which makes the description of our temporality dependent on the description of the things of our concern. Heidegger calls these things of our concern *das Vorhandene* (“subsisting things which our concern counts on”) and *das Zuhandene* (“utensils offered to our manipulation”).

from the natural environment. A day to begin with is the most natural way of measuring the time and in its existential significance links our concern with the light of the world. It is only when time is understood in terms of the magnitude of our concern, in correspondence to the world into which we are thrown in, that it no longer remains an abstract measure.¹⁰⁸

Subsequently, the implication of the word “Now” shifts to an existential representative of “now that.” If time was earlier understood in the sense of an abstract instant, of reading the hour in terms of the measurement of a clock, it now involves a preoccupation with “making present” that is inseparable from awaiting and retaining. Thus, Heidegger writes that saying “now” results in “the discursive Articulation of a making present which temporalizes itself in a unity with a retentive awaiting.”¹⁰⁹ As a result of the practicalities involved, when the time is cut off from the natural measures, linked with the light of the world, and is measured in terms of reading the clock then saying “now” is reduced to a form of abstract reading of linear time.¹¹⁰

In the same manner, the phenomenology of understanding a story in a narrative involves, following successive instants of thoughts, actions and feelings. It involves following a series of actions and experiences understood in relation to a change in the situation. This directedness help escape the ordinary notion of time conceived as a series of abstract instants in a linear direction. And the new predicament with its set of expectations reveals hidden aspects of the situation that calls for thinking, action or both. The outcome of such successive actions gives narration a new direction and pushes the story to its conclusion. Moreover, the success of reversing the sequence of the story and tracing it backwards is dependent on the expected directions or the teleological movement a narrative is likely to follow. However, in all these, a narrative’s conclusion can neither be deduced nor predicted as “There is no story if our attention is not moved along by a thousand contingencies.”¹¹¹

This configurational dimension is also responsible for superimposing “the sense of an ending,” to what would have otherwise been an open-ended succession. This explains for the

¹⁰⁸ In this respect, the most natural measurement of time is in terms of the day and in this sense *Dasein* according to Heidegger can be said to “historizes from day to day.” (*Being and Time* p. 466)

¹⁰⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, 1962), 469.

¹¹⁰ Ricoeur, *Narrative Time*, 174.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

reason why the act of telling is replaced by the act of retelling.¹¹² So following the story becomes relatively less important as compared to the act of apprehending the predictable end which is implied in the beginning itself. Through this act the experience of time is brought back from within-time-ness to repetition. In addition, recollecting the story provides us with the alternative of reading time as something that moves backward from the future into the past as opposed to its normal movement from past to the future.¹¹³ To read the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end provides the plot a platform to establish human action not only within time but also within memory, which serves as the counterpart of time as “stretching- along” a beginning and an end. The plot does not merely establish human action in memory but is responsible for making possible the “retrieval” of most of our fundamental potentialities inherited from past. The end of the story helps equates the present with the past, the actual with the potential.

In the act of recounting, the time of narrative becomes public to the extent that it is woven in common, in the course of interaction between the self and the “others” and is reflective of their acting and their suffering.¹¹⁴ However, as is normally the case, despite being “public” the character of time does not lapse into anonymity. This is because “in the most intimate Being-with-one another of several people, they can say now’ and say it together” where ‘now’ expresses the “publicness of Being-in-the-world with one another.”¹¹⁵ Apart from this novel way of looking at the meaning of public that is internal to the story, the audience of the story constitutes the other sense of public. Ricoeur particularly refers to the readers as “my own” and not “they.” And it is through such manner of recitation, that the story is integrated into a community who now constitutes the external public time.

A final characteristic of within-time-ness is illustrated in terms of narrative’s primary concern with the making-present or the time of “now that...” at the expense of awaiting and retaining. This activity of “intervention,” which includes the privilege discursive expression of preoccupation and present-making, help one to escape the mathematical representation of

¹¹² Ibid. 179 This is an expression he borrows from Frank Kermode

¹¹³ This provides an alternative to representation of “the arrow of time” as moving from past to the future

¹¹⁴ Ibid.176

¹¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 463.

ordinary time.¹¹⁶ This time is where a person can be said to be both responsible for being bound to the world order and abandoned for he or she at the same time can act. It involves a situation where in a person orients himself or herself to happenings he or she has not created and in the process produces consequences he or she has not intended. This instance of narrative's making – present involves suffering and acting and constitute the moment when actions that are possible are realized and become actual.¹¹⁷

Thus, the fundamental trait of a narrative's plot, understood in terms of the temporal dialectic, is constitutive of two dimensions, one chronological and the other non-chronological. Chronologically, the focus of a narrative is on how a story is and can be constructed out of events. However, configurationally, it goes beyond its episodic dimension to reveal how the plot in its act of "grasping together" construes significant wholes out of the discrete events.¹¹⁸ And these twofold structures of the plot are so remarkable that it helps narrative establish more than just humanity "in" time. It "brings us back from within-time-ness to historicity, "from reckoning with" time to "recollecting" it."¹¹⁹

5. Re-defining Imagination

A. Imagination as a Creative Act

Initially, considering the nature of different disciplines, one might argue that ethics with its call for systematic reflection on complex human conditions and careful applications of moral principles cannot be juxtaposed with creative imagination that engenders vision of artistry, invention, novelty, and fantasy. However, what we would like to attempt in this work is to reconsider this standpoint and argue that what constitutes an act of creation is not altogether different or opposed from discovery but in different manners and to differing levels fall together. This becomes apparent when a clear distinction is made between the categories of the imaginary and the imaginative. Though both imaginative and imaginary share a common ground and are

¹¹⁶ According to Ricoeur the phenomenon of "intervention" is what places narrative in a privileged position. This is a phenomenon that is missing in the Heideggerian analysis of saying "present" but is found to occupy a central position in Henrik von Wright's analysis of action theory.

¹¹⁷ See Claude Bremond's "La Logique des possibles narratifs," *Communications* 8 (1966): 60-76.

¹¹⁸ A term which Ricoeur borrows from Louis O. Mink, who is of the view that this configurational act of eliciting a pattern from a succession is what constitutes an act of "grasping together."

¹¹⁹ Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 7, No. 1, On Narrative (Autumn, 1980), pp. 169-190, 178.

creative acts competent to throw open reality for our deliberation and transform it, yet they differ. The crucial difference between the two lies with the fact that things that are associated with imaginary deliberately eschew direct identification with the “real world” and thereby is concerned with a world of fictional ideas. However, that which is imaginative is concerned with ways and means of dealing with and responding to the world. Imagination is implicated in our understanding of the reality of the world. Our most apparently straightforward human transactions with the world and our “knowing” of the world is in one sense or the other imaginatively constructed from the outset.¹²⁰

The Human world as we know is precisely the world in so far as it is meaningful and possessed of value for humans. We cannot help but experience the world in some form or the other as a “shared subjectivity.”¹²¹ However, in understanding our shared relationship with the world, attempts have been made by modern sciences to eliminate the “distortions” brought by human perspectives in interpreting the world. Nonetheless, as reality has always been mediated through some perspective or the other we cannot talk of prescinding these perspectives. Any engagement with the world and attempts to understand its meaning involves being concerned with what is perceived and experienced rather than being concerned with it purely in terms of a “physical” study of it.¹²² Mark Johnson, for instance points out that, in the process, it is with the help of imagination that the human experience is organized into coherent unities. Thus, if this assessment is true then imagination includes our ability to guarantee a novel order, a meaningful pattern and the ability to construct and reconstruct mental representations.

Experience, to begin with, is not something which that is unreflective and incoherent but is symbolically transformed by imagination. In the process we either articulate them or deliberately “untidy” them so as to experience them differently from another point of view. This act of deliberate manipulation according to Arthur Koestler is indispensable to the composition of human creativity and it can be at the same time said to liberate us from the straitjackets of conventionality.¹²³ This resort to a “poetic” makeover can be said to further grant us either a

¹²⁰ Mary Warnock in her book *Imagination* writes that “If below the level of consciousness, our imagination is at work tidying up the chaos of sense experience, at a different level it may, as it were, untidy it again.”

¹²¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self: The making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 54.

¹²² Anthony O’ Hear, *The Element of Fire: Science, Art and The Human World* (London: Routledge, 1988), 14.

¹²³ Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (London: Pan, 1964), 27, 44.

relatively shallow or a profound outlook in reorganizing the pattern of our understanding, i.e., breaking open the world afresh for us. Moreover, in the course of our experience of the world around us, when we direct our attention to a particular thing, though there may be no physical movement involved there is always a “stretching” to it. This act of reaching out allows for the image scheme to be mapped onto an altogether more abstract structure, allowing us to experience it meaningfully. Such metaphysical transfer of structure, endow meaning and brings order to our experience of the world.¹²⁴ Not only are they structured or created out of experience but as they develop according to the logic of metaphysical entailment they also in turn create and structure experiences that better “fits” the world. Thus, our grasping of the world is both experience constituted and experience constitutive.

B. Narrative Imagination

With the adoption of some of these figurative accounts the nature of the human world changes accordingly. This was what Ricoeur meant when he writes that language “invents” both in term of manifesting and creating. Any attempt to describe our world entails a dialectic between the tacit and the lucid that enable us to “create what they discover and invent what they find.”¹²⁵ However, such an approach should not be misunderstood as falling into a kind of subjectivism or relativism. Indeed, our experience of the world is to a large extent constructed out of our imaginative engagements. Nonetheless, the choices that we make is not taken in isolation but within the purview of public domain based on pragmatic considerations of choosing those perspectives that would best suit our needs as occupants of the world.

Thus, “If imaginations were not *always* at work, we could *never* have any coherent and unified experience or understanding.”¹²⁶ It not only creates the human world but also explains for the order and meaning in our lives. In case of narrative, its creativity lies in its ability to redescribe reality by synthesizing together the heterogeneous elements dispersed in time and space into some intelligible pattern. This act of productive synthesis can be traced back as far as the Poetics of Aristotle where the tools of *muthos* (emplotment) and *mimesis* (imitation of action) was employed. The employment of *muthos* and *mimesis* enables narrative to furnish us with a

¹²⁴ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1980)

¹²⁵ Hart, “Creative Imagination and Moral Identity”.

¹²⁶ Johnson, op. cit., p. 157.

range of thought experiments responsible for familiarising ourselves with the cause and the consequences of human conduct. Ricoeur also draws a parallel between what he calls “narrative understanding” and “the practical wisdom of moral judgment.” So, creative imagination by which, ‘moral order’ is generated far from being unruly or disruptive is a responsible extension of ourselves into the world. It in generating a meaningful discourse provides the best “fitting” available choices and enables us to exist in the world in ways that benefits our human nature.¹²⁷

In response to the question, “What it is to be human in the world?” Taylor writes that to be a self is to make sense of things, to find a ‘meaningfulness’ in the pattern of human life considered as a whole.¹²⁸ It also involves situating oneself in “moral space” in relation to particular concerns and issues that inescapably pre-exists for us irrespective of our own choosing or coincidences of historical and cultural circumstances. This leaves us with three fundamental questions that accounts for our particular moral reaction and our values. They are, what sort of a person can be considered to be good, and should I seek to become? What are my obligations towards others? And what are the characteristics in me that will command the respect of others in my dealings with them?¹²⁹ So a reply to these questions cannot be given simply on the basis of pragmatic considerations alone but has to be accounted keeping in mind moral experience. It is on the basis of this question and the proposed solution for it that distinction is drawn between a higher and lower pattern of human existence. In the process it comes out pretty much clearly that the need for human adherence to some set of qualitative distinctions, understood within a pattern of structure that involves a sense of the good is unavoidable.

However, speaking of coming up with a standard framework, that is designed to guarantee a sense of what consists of good, it generally is tacit and not universal. The patterns of framework that results from human construct as we discern and articulate “the sense of life” is never identical but varies. They are configurations that we create as we discover and discover as we create. The resulting frameworks are culturally constituted and culturally constitutive and so they do not maintain to possess absolute truth. Thus, there are no fixed patterns except for patterns of meaningfulness that provide us with “contestable answers to inescapable

¹²⁷ Johnson, op. cit., p. 162. George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation* (London: Faber, 2001), p. 153.

¹²⁸ Taylor, *Sources of the self*, 54.

¹²⁹ Ibid 15

questions.”¹³⁰ However, this does not mean that is a resort into some kind of relativism. Rather, it is very much reflective of our own discovery of human conditions qualified by our responsibility of “inventing” ways and means to attain the best account of the meaningfulness of human existence, placed in a particular situation. This pattern of meaningfulness leads to a form of engagement that is reflective of the nature of our embodiedness and inescapable embeddedness.

Again, the construction of this imaginative framework that is drawn upon tacitly and articulated through various engagements happens in the public space. These kinds of structures are found in various forms, starting right from our learning at our grandmother’s knee and in our everyday exchanges right up to the articulation in terms of “the arts” understood in the Kantian sense. And as things progresses we confront, engage, appropriate and occasionally do exchange these frameworks. In the process, the imaginative world of artistry which is reflective of our world cannot help impinging on our view of the “real world.” One of the explanations for this is because things which are ethical are inescapably woven in fiction and in this sense ethical knowledge are aesthetically mediated.¹³¹ Thus, Richard Kearney for instance observes that the relation between poetics and ethics is such that while ethics is concerned with the relation between virtue and the pursuit of happiness, the task of narrative is to provide us with diverse imaginative ways of seeing how the moral aspect of human behavior may be connected to the notion of happiness.¹³²

Nussbaum in taking cognizance of the ethical implication of imagination writes that arts play a crucial role in cultivating a strong sense of sympathetic imagination. It, she writes, “enable us to comprehend the motive and choices of people different from ourselves.”¹³³ Consequently, the powers of these tools are instrumental not only in transporting us to different times, places and cultures but also in placing us inside the mind of the others. It opens us up to the experiences, feelings and motivation of the other, enabling us to see the lives of others with more than ‘a casual tourist interest.’ Thus, in becoming the other for a while, one is able to transcend the existing binary between the self and the other. The possible experience of the world from a

¹³⁰ Ibid 41

¹³¹ Colin McGinn, *Ethics, Evil and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 175.

¹³² Richard Kearney and James Williams, “Narrative and Ethics” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes, Vol. 70 (1996), pp.29-45+47-61, 30.

¹³³ Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (London: Havard University Press, 1997), 85.

new vantage point enables us to have a deeper understanding of different worlds such that it renders us less inclined to denigrate it from afar. This experience of the world from a different view point makes us to re-evaluate our own vantage point.

6. Understanding Moral Imagination

A. Moral Understanding and Imagination

Now, if the focus of morality revolves around questions of choosing between alternate possibilities, choices for which a person can be held accountable, then understanding the context within which the process of evaluation and envisaging of these possibilities occurs is important. In such situations, identifying those conflicting and incommensurable values, reasons on the basis of which a person is said to have done something or could have chosen to do something else becomes vital. Given a particular situation, it makes judgment making difficult. The complexities of such situations are best summarized by Nagel when he writes that,

obligations, rights, utility, perfectionist ends, and private commitments—these values enter into our decisions constantly, and conflicts among them and within them, arise in medical research, in politics, in personal life, or wherever the grounds of action are not artificially restricted. What should it mean to give a system of priorities among them? A simpler moral conception might permit a solution in terms of a short list of clear prohibitions and injunctions, with the balance of decision left to personal preference or discretion, but that will not work with so mixed a collection.¹³⁴

Knowing well the complexities of the moral situations that we are face with we need to be equipped with more than the application of just rules and principles. One has to configure a novel potentiality in reading the situation's possibilities and here the role of moral deliberation which is essentially said to be imaginative becomes important.¹³⁵ Its relevance can be felt, given the fact that in our everyday life one is confronted with situations that calls for making decisions that lies beyond the presupposed boundary set by the then established moral norms. In such situations, where there is failure to come up with the best solution, one often finds that the

¹³⁴ Nagel (1979) 131

¹³⁵ Colin McGinn in his *Ethics, Evil and Fiction* (Clarendon press, 1997 p 175) points out that the what we consider the ethical is invariably embedded in fiction, and so what we call ethical knowledge is something that is aesthetically mediated.

question of “how should we live?” is disengaged from the question of “how do human beings actually make sense of their moral experience?”¹³⁶ And a possible explanation for the failure to see the interdependence between the two is because the role of imagination, which has traditionally been pitted against reason, is ruled out as any attempts that involve the employment of imagination in moral deliberation is feared to result in fanciful or whimsical resolutions. Thus, we end up unsuccessful applying the existing rules to new challenges that confront us and that are in need of a novel solution. This failure to come up with innovative responses that are fitting to the context-specific issues rather than resolving the issue often complicates it and such failures calls for a serious rethinking of the problem solving process itself.

However, our understanding of imagination has undergone a positive change, beginning with the writings of philosophers like Hume and Kant the import of imagination and so has its focus changed.¹³⁷ Imagination is no longer seen or defined in terms of acts that are markedly restricted to that which is imaginary or fantasy, wishful thinking or doubtful reality. It is seen as a creative process that involves “seeing in terms of possibilities, ...old things in new relations,” that is integrated to everyday life and lies at the root of thinking. With the writings of Kant, imagination was placed once more at the heart of the entire knowing process. He observes that,

Synthesis in general is the mere result of the power of imagination...without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are scarcely ever conscious. To bring this synthesis to concepts is a function which belongs to understanding, and it is through this function of the understanding that we first obtain knowledge, properly so called.¹³⁸

Subsequently, what we would like to pursue is to push forward the argument that the involvement of a rich imagination that is perceptive, creative, skillful, nuanced and responsive to the prevailing narrative is as much a required moral tool for a successful moral communication. The reason behind such proposal stems from a belief that the more refined and profound the discerning power of imagination becomes the higher is the possibility of coming up with better

¹³⁶ Williams (1985) makes the distinction between Kantian and Aristotelian ethics in this way.

¹³⁷ Kant’s contribution to the subject matter of imagination is very important from the point that he not only took into account imagination’s reproductive capacity but in *Critique of judgment* he discussed about its power of creativity in reflective judgments and in developing novel meaning.

¹³⁸ Critique of Pure Reason, A78/B103.

alternatives that can mediate between the contending values in the process of constructing a meaningful narrative out of the seemingly arbitrary or unstructured alternative before us.¹³⁹ Thus, as a result of this experiment with imaginative understanding in general, we are granted with three broad sets of possibilities. They are, possibilities that are generally available in our present context, possibilities that we would believe ourselves to have, provided our belief is reasonable, and the possibility we actually believe ourselves to have.¹⁴⁰ The role of moral imagination in this regard is to help us distinguish those suitable possibilities from those possibilities that amount to wishful thinking.

In our confrontation with challenges, we are often constrained to balance between two incompatible and yet inextricable aspects of morality. The first set of morality involves following a fixed set of rules as opposed to an understanding of morality that in taking cognizance of the unprecedented and thus the contingent nature of human encounters calls into action an imaginative ability to see.¹⁴¹ The former order concerns a moral code, where the application and observation of rules is to be strictly maintained, with no exceptions allowed, in the course of decision making. However, in case of the latter, it involves an engagement with moral imagination which in taking cognizance of extenuating circumstances approaches the problem with principles that are fluid and flexible. To strike a balance between a coded rules and imagination, we will rely upon what we shall call here an ethical remove - an arm's length stance from which the incommensurate sides of morality are examined with as much dispassion and objectivity as can be mustered.

In traditional ethical thought, morality is often seen as a commitment to a strict moral code such as “an eye for an eye.” However in many such incidences a strict adherence to the code, instead of resolving the issue often leads to consequences that are uncalled for or results that are inconsequential. In order to address this problem of limitation that is often associated with the process of complying with a strict moral code, some philosophers have argued that rationality

¹³⁹ Mark Johnson in his book *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason* writes that, “If imagination were not always at work, we could never have any coherent and unified experience or understanding.” 157.

¹⁴⁰John Kekes, “Moral Imagination, Freedom, and the Humanities,” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (April, 1991), 105.

¹⁴¹For Nussbaum, a moral situation is not something to which rules are applied, but from which moral demands arise.

should constitute the ground on which morality should be grounded.¹⁴² However, others have objected to this proposal, on the ground that rationality too has its strictures and thus its limitations, especially when it comes to issues of moral concern. MacIntyre, for instance, identifies the limitations of reason in moral debates and postulates, albeit tentatively, a resolution in the form of a special imaginative capacity for judgment, which he aligns with virtue. In the same vein, Nussbaum also argues that getting morality right is not a question of measuring out a situation following the rules, which would antecedently apply to it and speak in universal terms. Nevertheless the question of morality can be narrowed down to the issue of seeing things and being sensitive to the “contingent complexities of a tangled human life.”¹⁴³ Getting them right involves passing a judgment suited to the “bewildering moral occasion,” made at the right time and perhaps even said in the right tone of voice.

B. Moral Imagination and Narratives

On further examination of the problem of moral dilemmas, MacIntyre identifies three problems which he holds responsible for making moral debates unending and ultimately irresolvable. The first and foremost of these is what he calls the problem of incommensurability. In such a scenario, we are faced with two contenting moral claims, both of which are strong contenders as both have logically valid conclusions following from premises that are but incomparable as they are based on quite different normative concepts. The second problem with moral argument lies in its nature of being impersonal and rational, in trying to be objective. This effort to be objective has often proven to be a costly affair as in the process of deciding what is morally right or wrong it has resulted in precluding the preferences or attitudes of the speaker or hearer, or the standards of justice or questions of generosity or duty, which at the end are factors around which moral issues revolve. The third problem lies with its attempt to bypass history. This results in the built-up of a context-blind situation as what is supposedly impersonal are in fact rooted in a history of personal contexts and is crucial to understanding moral obligation.

¹⁴²As Alasdair MacIntyre observes philosophers of morality such as R. M. Hare, John Rawls, Alan Donagan, Gert, and Alan Gewirth hold that the notion of rationality itself supplies morality with a basis. To which Bernard Williams has remarked that: “Contemporary moral philosophy has found an original way of being boring, which is by not discussing moral issues at all.”

¹⁴³ Martha Nussbaum, *Love's knowledge: essays on philosophy and literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 140

Following this line of argument for MacIntyre the answer to the moral question, What am I to do?, is possible only when one seeks to find an answer to the question “Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?”¹⁴⁴ And one of the reasons why narratives are seen as educative in moral principles is because stories are not to be seen simply as presentation or accounting of facts but they do involve recounting of values.¹⁴⁵ Narratives provide us with a structure within which the moral meaning of a given experience is brought out and so it acts as a medium for our ethics. In addition, one of the best and easiest way of learning the theory and practice of morality would be to learn them in an easy and conducive manner whenever possible and in this direction stories have proven to be one of the effective methodology of the getting the message across in a relatable way.

Nussbaum on similar lines argues against moral theories which have for their groundings the moral code of commensurability. She holds them guilty of banking on a reductionist “utilitarian rational-choice model” account, where all things valuable are considered measurable on a single scale of quantity.¹⁴⁶ The problem with adopting such an approach is that since it fails to take into account the qualitative differences it fails to acknowledge and reflect upon the complexities of inner moral life of each human being. To this end she enlists the backing of imaginative capacities which she holds is central to the nature of good judgment. In *Love's Knowledge* Nussbaum observes that moral knowledge entails “seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling.”¹⁴⁷

Nussbaum has also in her writings brought out the instrumentality of literary works in moral education. In reply to the question “How should we live our life?” she is of the view that literature provide us with “a sufficiently rich and inclusive conception of the opening question and of the dialectical procedure that pursues it—inclusive enough to hold all that our sense of life urges us to consider”¹⁴⁸ Besides she also points out that such an inclusive conception of ethics

¹⁴⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed., (Notre Dame/Ind, 1984), 216.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 3 Here he writes in support of the literary critics who are against novelist who write of characters that lack moral sensibility thus without. They are correct in doing so as “the novelist's problem ... is precisely a unification of fact and value, the exhibiting of personal morality in a non-abstract manner as the stuff of consciousness”

¹⁴⁶ According to Nussbaum, the utilitarian mind is “blind to the qualitative richness of the perceptible world” (Nussbaum, 1991, p. 888).

¹⁴⁷ Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 152.

¹⁴⁸ Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 26.

requires a certain framework which one finds only in selected literary works.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, as far as the question of justification is concerned, narratives not only provides a medium in which a concern for virtue becomes feasible but it also provides us with such examples or parables as are pervasive in all forms of ethical reasoning. And it is in responses to such stories that are good, bad or indifferent that we built up our ethical principles and theories.

¹⁴⁹ Martha Nussbaum, *Plato's 'Republic': the good society and the deformation of desire* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1998), 346

CHAPTER 2

AUTHENTICITY AND NARRATIVITY

1. The Issue

A distinctive feature of recent Western intellectual developments according to Charles Taylor has been the growing interest in what is called the “age of authenticity”¹ that allows a person to express who he or she really is. Understood in the light of the increasing demands that a rapidly growing society makes on the individual, the concept gained significance not just in the field of philosophy but even in contemporary social and political discourse. A frequently asked question is “what is it to be one with oneself, or truly representing one's self?” This ideal is aptly captured by Bernard Williams when he writes that it is “the idea that some things are in some sense really you, or express what you are, and others aren't”² Its characteristic feature comes out clearly in situations where an individual, in making a choice or performing an act, despite those choices and acts being undeniably his or her own makings, disowns them on the ground that they are not *really* reflective of him or her as they are not genuinely expressive of what he or she is.

However, apart from engaging in a process of inward turning and accessing the “true” self, being authentic also implies a deeper engagement with the society.³ Proponents of it has consistently been arguing that the relationship between the individual and community is the source of the authentic self and this bond explains why authenticity is far removed from narcissism. It also involves a reflection on the concept of good life and well being, a question which was a pre-occupation of philosophical discussions during the time of the ancient Greeks and the Romans and holds relevance even today. So, understanding the growing significance of the role that individuals have to play in the society as well as the need to preserve his or her originality it becomes essential to investigate the historical and philosophical sources of authenticity and the way it effects the socio-political outlook of contemporary societies.

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University press, 2007).

² Bernard Williams, Interview with Stuart Jeffries, *The Guardian*, 30 November, 2002, quoted in Guignon, *On being Authentic*, (London: Routledge, 2004), viii.

³ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 419-455.

However, the scope of this study would be limited to understanding authenticity from the perspective of how this exercise of inward looking process impacts the question of identity formation as the self engages itself in a narrative discourse with itself and the society in which he or she is placed. This becomes intelligible as understood against the background of modernity and the need of the individual to assert his or her place in the society. Firstly, it was Rousseau's work that made a significant contribution to the popularization of the concept of authenticity.⁴ The ideal of authenticity also gained wider acceptance as it found its way into popular culture through a wide array of works of those intellectuals, who in embracing it, found multiple ways of expressing it terms of alternative, "artistic" or "bohemian" modes of life while resisting the established code of conduct. Especially, in the post Second World War era, the works of Sartre and Heidegger made an extensive contribution towards the popularization of this ideal.⁵

In contrast to the standard brands of Enlightenment ethics, such as utilitarianism that focuses on the consequences or Kantianism that stresses on rules or form, these ethical enterprises seems to be primarily concerned with who gets to tell the story.⁶ More specifically, the expressivist imperative is that everyone gets to tell his or her own story and so has been described as an ethics of voice. In light of this understanding, we will build up on Taylor as well as Ricoeur to see what are the implications that conceptualizing authenticity in terms of a narrative function has for identity theory. This study will be carried out while taking into considerations both the need for a commitment to one's system of self-values and the need to response to the demands that society makes on the individual.

Therefore, the intent of this chapter is primarily to examine the role that authenticity plays in the construction of a self identity and the extent to which narrative can accommodate the demands of authenticity in turn. Accordingly, faced with the challenges that modernity poses to the identity of the self, we will trace the history of how a call to a life of self-discovery and self-fulfillment leads to the concept of authenticity. We will begin with an examination of how the concept of authenticity is different from other concepts such as sincerity and autonomy understood in the light of the demands that the society makes on the individual. It will also in

⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The New Heloise: Letters of Two Lovers Who Live in a Small Town at the foot of Alps*, trans. P. Stewart and J. Hanover, (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1761) was enormously influential and Particularly with at least 70 editions in print before 1800 (Darnton 1984: 242).

⁵ Taylor, *A secular Age*, 475.

⁶Hilde Nelson, ed. *Stories and Their Limits: Narrative Approaches to Bioethics* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 80.

exploring the various expositions of authenticity given by different philosophers examine how this concept has been evolving historically. This kind of engagement will also help strengthen our understanding of authenticity in a much better way, the role it plays in shaping the identity of the self. Later on, this will be followed by a critique of how the concept of authenticity fits into the bigger picture of a narrative construction of the self and how these acts of authentic narrations contribute and can act as a means in the discovery as well as construction of the self.

2. An Overview of Authenticity

With a number of significant cultural developments taking place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, society was understood not only as a collection of individual human beings but as a social system with a life of its own.⁷ This way of understanding the society also leads to a reassessment of the individual's standing in the society. Humans by nature are unique and distinct, even to the extent that this distinctiveness collide with certain social norms and this is the reason why humans by virtue of being an individual, and not because of any extraordinary feat, occupy the centre of attention. Following this nature, there was an increasing awareness of what Taylor calls a sense of "inwardness" or "internal space,"⁸ that explains for the distinction between one's private space which accounted for the person's unique individuality, and one's public space within which the individual engages and is embedded.

The ideal of authenticity as we now know appeared together with a characteristically modern conception of the self. The measure of an individual's actions and thereof his or her worth was appraised in terms of the criterion whether they spring from the core or from a peripheral place and whether they were expressive of the essential aspects of one's identity.⁹ Thus, for someone like Rousseau, acting on reasons that comes from factors that are not informed by the essential aspects of oneself or one's inner core but either from the fringes or external to the self, amounts to self-betrayal and annihilation of the self. In the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau in arguing further contents that it is with the increasing influence of a competitive public sphere, that an individual's ability to dig deeper inward is increasingly

⁷ Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

⁸ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

⁹ This is visible in the work of Rousseau, *Confessions* [Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ed. Lester Crocker, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (New York: Pocket Books, 1770)], who argues that the orientation toward life that should guide the conduct one chooses should come from a source within.

compromised. The reason for adopting such a position comes from the general observation that competitive relations demands intense role-playing, which at the end not only causes alienation, but ultimately leads to inequality and injustice.¹⁰

3. Sincerity, Autonomy and Authenticity

However, before we go into a more detailed discussion of what authenticity consists of and amounts to, it would be useful at this stage to make clear the distinction between sincerity, autonomy and authenticity. To start with, a person can be said to be sincere when he or she in all honesty keep the law and tries to neither violate the rules as well as the expectations that is attached to the place or position he or she holds in society, nor strives to appear otherwise than he or she ought to.¹¹ However, the weakness with this “honest” bourgeois approach, as pointed out by Hegel, lies with the weaknesses that an individual in passively internalizing a particular conventional social ethos becomes uncritically compliant to the powers of the society. Gradually, this ideal of sincerity lost its normative appeal as can be seen from Hegel’s polemic reference to it as “the heroism of dumb service.”¹² This kind of conformity or unquestioning compliance he holds leads to a state of domination and a degeneration of the individual.

Eventually, in the progress of “spirit”, as the individual becomes critical of the external societal powers, this demand for sincerity is replaced by a condition of baseness and the individual achieves a measure of autonomy.¹³ Essentially, the idea behind autonomy is built around the belief that individual’s have their own self-governing abilities. By virtue of this capacity to decide what is best for oneself, individuals have the liberty to make one's choices free from external influences. Accordingly, the self-governing individual is also understood as the source of moral principles as well as political authority. The justification as to why each

¹⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of inequality*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992 [1754]), 22. Rousseau calls the ongoing instrumental role-playing an “excessive labor.”

¹¹ Peter Berger, “On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor,” in *European Journal of Sociology* 11, no. 2 (1970): 338-347 hold that ideals like sincerity and honor has become obsolete

¹² G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Vol.2. (London: Routledge, 2002), 515.

¹³ Hegel clearly brings out the difference between the two ideals in Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*. In the story the narrator is portrayed as someone who is reasonable and sincere and has achieved bourgeois respectability and is one who respects the prevailing order. However, he finds himself in opposition to himself, because he still aspires to a better standing in a society, which he believes has nothing but emptiness to offer. In contrast, the nephew who is “disintegrated” is alienated and full of contempt for the society. But for Hegel, this alienation is a step in the progression towards autonomous existence (Williams 2002: 190).

individual can adopt these norms lies in the explanation that these choices are made on the basis of rational reflection.

Similarly, just as the concept of autonomy differs from that of sincerity, the concept of authenticity, despite sharing certain common characteristics with autonomy, is different from that of autonomy and this differences need to be elaborated further. Basically, both authenticity and autonomy are alike in the sense that both in response to the question how an individual should live one's life depends on the directive of one's own reasons and motives, and one's capacity to follow these *self-imposed* guidelines. The only condition for both the cases is that the individual must have the competence to execute one's own actions and goals under reflexive scrutiny.¹⁴ But the basic difference lies in that the earlier conception of being truthful "*in order thereby* to be true to others," is replaced by a new conception of authenticity, understood as "being true to oneself for one's own benefit." Thus, if earlier being true to oneself was seen as a *means* aimed at entering into a successful social relationship, this notion is replaced by a kind of understanding, wherein a choice is made and an action is executed because the act of choosing or acting is choiceworthy in itself.¹⁵

Primarily, the growing interest in the idea of authenticity has led to an acknowledgement of the dominant "ethics of autonomy" that has shaped modern moral thought.¹⁶ The ethics of authenticity differs from the ethics of autonomy in holding that apart from the question of rational choices there are motives, desires and commitments that are involved in the formation of one's self identity. These are concerns that go beyond the reach of rational reflections and so fall outside the domain of rational expanse. The inescapability of these desires and motives to the construction of one's own identity as a moral agent is of such that there is no scope of bypassing or overriding them. Ignoring them would result in disintegration of the self. Thus, the notion of authenticity goes further in anticipating the fact that there are types of moral philosophical

¹⁴ Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflict*, trans Joel Anderson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Alessandro Ferrara, *Modernity and Authenticity: A Study of the Social and Ethical Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, (Albany, NY: Sunny Press, 1993).

¹⁶ Gerald Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

principles that can be oppressive as they arise from “an autonomous moral conscience not complemented by sensitivity to the equilibrium of identity and by authenticity.”¹⁷

Authenticity also entails a characteristic feature that lies beyond the reach of autonomy, namely a “language of personal resonance.”¹⁸ Unlike autonomy, authenticity not only requires of us to lead a life that in being unconstrained and is guided by reason but demands that these motives and reasons be expressively indexed to a personal vision.¹⁹ It requires of the individual to follow only those “moral sources *outside* the subject [that speak in a language] which resonate[s] *within* him or her.”²⁰ Freedom is not about being simply involved in the authorship of a self-given law but most importantly is it about how this law is expressive of who the person is. Thus, while the idea of sincerity vouches for following the ideals laid down by the society, the idea of autonomy goes a step further in holding that following the societal norms in itself is not enough. Each individual must, in the course of his interaction with the society, decide for himself or herself the future directions of action on the basis of his or her own rational deliberations. However, authenticity goes even beyond the prescriptions of autonomy in holding that if an action is at all going to be reflective of what it means to be me then in such cases feelings that are reflective of an individual’s deepest desires can and does overrule the outcome of these rational deliberations.

4. Countering Authenticity

However, the ideal of authenticity with its focus on the need for a personal resonance, while making life choices, is not without its share of opposition. A very common ground of objection rests on the fear that giving too much importance to on one’s own inner feeling may led to an obsessive pre-occupation with oneself, disengaging the individual from the society and his or her ground realities. Critics of authenticity have often alluded to the similarities it shares with persons who suffer from Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Christopher Lasch, for instance, have pointed out that both narcissism and authenticity exhibit the same characteristic traits of deficient

¹⁷ Ferrara, *Modernity and Authenticity*, 102

¹⁸ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 90.

¹⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 510.

²⁰ *Ibid*

empathic skills, self-indulgence and self-absorbed behavior.²¹ Similarly, Allan Bloom also maintains that the practice of authenticity results in self-centeredness and eventually in the collapse of the public self that has turned the minds of the youth “narrower and flatter.”²² In addition, Daniel Bell also speaks of a possible ramification this “megalomania of self-infinetization” might have in disrupting the very foundation of a moral based market system of reward that is structured around “the Protestant sanctification of work”²³

However, in response to all the above objections it can be argued that all these fears and perceptions holds true only if it can be shown that authenticity as a personal virtue is opposed to one’s social life and fundamentally prone to anti-social behaviour. Many thinkers have put forward arguments that counter this observation. Rousseau, for instance, while admitting the presence of certain immoral characteristics as immanent in man holds that the disposition of alienation is external to man. Understood in this way, authenticity does not give rise to egoism or self-absorption as it was feared. The original nature of man, he holds, is sensitive to the suffering of our fellow-man.²⁴ Rather, he sees these negative tendencies as a product of the modern society that is rooted in the tradition of relating to others as competitors and always in the need for recognition. Taylor’s argument is in agreement with this view and in order to remedy the existing gap he holds that the process of accessing the “true” self or the trajectory in which the project of authenticity is moving is something that is “inward and upward” which would gradually led one towards a deeper engagement with the social world.²⁵

Again, criticism can also be made in showing that the propositions on which the argument is premised is built around an overly optimistic idea of the “inner” nature of human as a morally worthy guide which can be proven to be false. Nietzsche and Freud, for instance, in recognizing the reality of the threat that the non-rational elements posed have particularly argued against this misconception and depiction of the “inner” nature of human as fundamentally good. Following this “hermeneutics of suspicion,” apart from the tendencies of beneficence and altruism, the nature of human can be said to include elements of violence, disorder and unreason.

²¹ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, (New York: Norton, 1979)

²² Allan Bloom, *The closing of the American mind*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 61.

²³ Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 84.

²⁴ Rousseau, *Confessions*, 14.

²⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 419–455.

Based on these arguments one can safely say that any idea of ethics, primarily based on the ideal of authenticity and constructed in ignorance or indifference to the lower nature of human is incomplete and simply untenable.

Apart from these observations, objections have also been raised that are concerned with the nature of the self underlying the idea of authenticity. Some sees the dichotomies between independence and conformity, individual and society, or inner-directedness and other-directedness, binaries around which the concept authenticity is built as unnecessary and entirely misguided. In such cases, the pursuit of authenticity becomes self-defeating as with the deletion of the bond an individual shares with the society the sense of self is also said to diminish.²⁶ The rationale behind such objection lies in the observation that an authentic self is structured around the relationship the individual shares with the society and so any attempts to separate the individual from the community is ultimately absurd.²⁷

Now, any talk of the existence of a self with some essential properties, who in being accessible through introspection is waiting to be discovered and so forth, seems doubtful. Adorno, for instance, sees the idea of authenticity or the “liturgy of inwardness” as flawed as it is built around the concept of a self that is transparent and capable of choosing herself.²⁸ For Foucault too, there is nothing such as a self that is given to itself in advance and any talk of an authentic self is nothing other than a reflection of the “Californian cult of the self.”²⁹ For him, it is the subject as a whole and not just authenticity that is witnessing a crisis which threatens the self to be “erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”³⁰ Thus, rather than search for a true self that is hidden, he holds that one must create oneself as a work of art.³¹ On a similar

²⁶ Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

²⁷ Philip Elliot Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 15.

²⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, Trans. Knut Tranowski and Federic Will, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 70.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Michel Foucault Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 266.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 387.

³¹ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 392. The recognition that the subject is one should attempt to shape one's life as a work of art, proceeding without recourse to any fixed rules or permanent truths in a process of unending becoming.

line, Richard Rorty argues that the idea of coming to “know a truth which was out there (or in here) all the time”³² is simply a myth.

5. Rousseau on Authenticity

Any talk of Authenticity must involve an engagement with a reading of Rousseau’s philosophy who is credited as one of the earliest thinkers to articulate in greater details the modern conception of self, its issues and thus concerns surrounding the concept of authenticity. He refers to this intimate relationship, the contact of the self with oneself, as a source of joy and contentment and names it as “*le Sentiment de l’existence*,” which translates as “a sense of the existence of a reality.”³³ His conception of authenticity finds a place of merit in the discourse on modernity for its understanding of the human subjectivity as a dialogically constituted subjectivity vis-a vis the need for attaining a stable condition of solitary bliss.

Modernity, for him involves an examination and expression of human potentialities. In his treatment of the modern self, there is a persistent concern with identity, self-realization, and authenticity, understood in terms of the individual standing for himself or herself. Thus, though his philosophy is essentially political in nature directed towards building a sense of creative human self-realization, underlying this understanding is a conception of philosophical anthropology, the end of which is authenticity. He intends to create a community that provides opportunity for an integral development and expression of an authentic personality. But in doing so he also offers a very deep and extensive critique of the artificiality and corruption that modern civilization is diseased with in holding that the current social and political structures do restrict and enslave the individuals, stifling their potentialities.

The term “authenticity” as an expression of an individual’s characteristic trait is partly descriptive and partly normative. It is descriptive in the sense that the individual is the originator of the expression and normative in the sense that an individual is responsible and owns for the expression. At the same time, it is said to be intersubjective to the extent that it depends on the confirmation or recognition by others. This trait keeps the individual from slipping into a form of

³²Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 27.

³³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses Together with the Replies to Critics and Essay on the Origin of Languages*, trans. Victor Gourevitch, (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), I, 21; III, 144.

narcissism. Thus, for an experience to be counted as authentic it is not enough that the experience be seen as “objective.” Rather, it must have a sense of “genuine”, something that is intimate and of personal significance to the experiencing subject. Nonetheless, the realization of personal authenticity is often curtailed by the need of approval from others, especially, in societies seeped in inequality and hierarchy.

Rousseau believes that what is authenticity is something that emanates from the natural self, whereas that which is inauthentic is a result of factors from outside or those of external influences. In making clear the distinction between the two contrasting picture of the self, he identifies self-love or *amour de soi* as ‘the only passion natural to man.’³⁴ Self-love, in its most heightened form is always in “conformity with order” and it is good.³⁵ It is different from and should not be confused with *amour-propre* or ‘self-pride’ which arises from comparative and false reflection or in “the first look which the individual casts upon his fellows.”³⁶ This kind of love is a relative feeling, an unnatural feeling that comes not from the inside and is that kind of feeling which makes an individual to be concerned exclusively with his or her interests at the expense of others and so results in negativity.

This dual nature of self can best be understood and is reflected in the ambivalent nature of civilization. For him, civilization creates conditions and possibilities for a higher kind of moral and social identity, provisions that are absent in case of the state of nature. It provides us with the opportunities for the growth and development of authentic moral personal identities. At the same time, ironically, it is responsible for creating people that are discontented, envious, and inauthentic which acts as a deterrence, a threat to the individual’s self-expression. Therefore, while he does not deny that the socially created “I” is the basis for a moral I, Rousseau is equally aware that it is also the source of inauthenticity. The social I is antithetical to the natural I or precisely the concept of “civilized sociality” is contrary to what the “primary naturalization” stands for.

³⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *EMILE or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), II, 92.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “...the first glance on his fellows leads him to compare himself with them. And the first sentiment aroused in him by this comparison is the desire to be in the first position. This is the point where love of self turns into *amour-propre*...” Ibid. III, 235.

For Rousseau, morality is grounded in sensibility but by this he does not mean that it is reducible to simple innate impulses. It is constituted by two forms, physical and moral. Physical sensibility is primarily concerned with bodily objects, a sense of one's own self-preservation and satisfaction of bodily appetites. Moral or active sensibility, on the other hand, involves the capacity for satisfying emotional needs through a spontaneous attraction towards other people. And this moral sensibility, according to Rousseau is a "pure matter of feeling in which reflection plays no part."³⁷ It is an active and positive force which has its origin in *amour de soi*. It is also seen as an unrestrained sensibility that harbors emotions which motivates an individual to 'transport himself outside himself.'³⁸ This expansive force of the heart gives rise to a state of strength which in allowing the individual to look beyond himself or herself prompts the individual to look to other people.

However, at the same time, this expansive force is not to be confused with the intent to create something new, over and against the original nature, but is more of a nature of a resulting thing that follows from the progress and order of nature. Whilst a self-sufficient life of instinct and feeling has its own appeal, at the end it lacks the genuine moral quality that arises from and is essential for human interactions. For Rousseau, we truly begin to live only when we are brought into contact and become involved with the lives of others. Thus, reciprocity forms an essential feature of true love which modern society has extinguished. At every stage of our life, we find ourselves involved in a relationship at different levels with our own being, the being of others, the environment and the universal order, so one can say that an individual is integrated within and contributes to the harmony of the whole.

Rousseau argues that a man left to himself can be happy and free in his natural surroundings, in the lap of nature but that would only give rise to an individual who is being 'good without merit.'³⁹ An individual cannot achieve happiness and enjoy a stable relationship until he learns to detach himself from his desires. If an individual is to become a truly moral being his natural goodness needs to be supplemented by the will. Virtue, in teaching individuals to resist natural feelings and surrender their immediate interest to a higher good, is said to

³⁷ Roger D. Masters, Christopher Kelly, and Judith R. Bush, eds., *Rousseau, judge of Jean-Jacques, dialogues* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2012), 112.

³⁸ Rousseau, *Emile*, II, 104.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, V, 473.

“denature” human beings. However, this kind of a separation is what enables individuals to achieve a higher mode of existence.⁴⁰ This exercise is in tune with the true nature of a person who is virtuous and is reflective of his or her moral interest.

It is at this stage of the discussion that Rousseau brings in the notion of conscience which he describes as a ‘divine instinct.’ Just as the instinct is seen as ‘the voice of the body’, so is conscience “the voice of the soul.”⁴¹ It forms the most intimate nature of human beings and results in the spontaneous expression of the original. It belongs to the spiritual part of human being and lies within each of us as moral beings and is identified as “the divine spark.” It is natural but appears to be otherwise owing to the corruption of contemporary civilization. It argues Rousseau, is indefinable more as a feeling rather than a judgment and has the qualities of the directness and simplicity of nature itself. An individual who follows what his conscience tells him can be said to abide by the rules which is “written in the depth of his heart in indelible characters.”⁴²

From the above arguments it becomes clear that the love for self is not reducible to those acts that have their origin in simple passion. It consists of an active intelligent principle and a passive “sensitive’ principle.”⁴³ In this “ordered progress,” we do not figure as an isolated individual but instead becomes conscious that we are a part of the greater whole, a universal system. It is only when we realize the nature of interdependence between the self and the universe then can we say that the individual has truly comprehended the involvedness of his own being. When a society deprives individuals of this natural individuality, it fails to satisfy its members and therefore decays from within. And in such cases, where it is said to prevent individuals from realizing their potentiality, then revolution becomes inevitable. Thus, for an individual to develop to his or her fullest, it becomes important that they are involved in a

⁴⁰ La Nouvelle Héloïse, Rousseau portrays virtue as ‘a state of war’: ‘in order to live in it one has always to undertake some struggle against oneself’ (ii.682).

⁴¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, IV, 286.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Rousseau writes that Conscience develops and acts only with man’s understanding; it is only because of his understanding that he comes to know order, and it is only when he knows this order that his conscience impels him to love it. See in Ibid., I, 67.

reciprocal relationship which has for its basis the active consent of the individuals themselves or an authentic engagement.

However, he articulates that the repressive state, characteristic of modern civilizations are not as it is thought to be, arbitrary impositions from outside, but an extended growth of a corrupted soil. The state and society comprise a unity rather the state is an extension, a growth of the society. This kind of social system is responsible for alienating humans not only from each other but also from their own selves. It is responsible for creating a big gap between human as they are and as they could have been, between expectations and the ground reality. And this problem of self-estrangement was not merely confined to how an individual appears but what he or she was in actuality. Thus, for Rousseau, the emerging modern society stood not for the victory of reason over alienation but was representative of the culmination of human self-estrangement.

While acknowledging that the self can live authentically and develop only in a relationship of correlation within the constitution of the society, viewed from the perspective of essential human characteristics such as individuality, authenticity and creativity, the modern world with its “rational” was anything but a world of reason. For him, “The gravest fault of great cities is that men become different from what they are; society gives them a being different from their own.”⁴⁴ The reason for such a state is that individuals were driven from without, not from within. It is only when the distinctive faculty of the free and intelligent being is allowed to be open that the meaning of the word “is” is realized.⁴⁵ This becomes possible only when an individual is free from his or her self-contained inner desires and impulses and develops a feeling for others and starts to see them as persons in their own rights.

The independence of the self depends on the sincere expression of the self which modern civilization threatens to curb. Yet, it is in this sincere expression of the self that the individual is uncovered, making him or her more vulnerable. According to Rousseau, man in the state of nature is a noble savage whose nature is governed by “real needs.” He is governed by the principle of self-love which is identifiable with man’s natural propensity to preserve life under the given conditions. But as a result of accidental causes we begin to develop other needs,

⁴⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Oeuvres completes*, ii. 21, 273.

⁴⁵ iv.571.

artificial needs which creates conditions for new passions that puts the self in a more vulnerable position. Under these conditions there develops a self-conscious subject with increasingly new needs and passion and a consequent loss of freedom. These increasingly finer shades of needs and their fulfillment and the resultant dependency raise questions over the issue of freedom and ultimately a question over one's authenticity.

The above conditions create a kind of atmosphere where one begins to inquire, what are the distinctive features of felt needs, those needs that are expressive of the individual? How different are they from other needs that are but expressive of the external demands? Most importantly, when can one truly be proud of what one "is" irrespective of the other's appraisal? These questions become more difficult given that civilization which serves as a precondition for an authentic expression of the self becomes the factor that is responsible for curbing humans from expressing his or her authenticity. For Rousseau, the solution to all these questions lays in the conception of a good society, particularly in the "general will." This general will, he holds, is a political order that is responsible for creating a society that allows for the individual to preserve his freedom.

Primarily, a justification for such a resolve in Rousseau lies on the knowledge that for him issues of authenticity are also part of the problem of politics. The general will as such is said to have its base that what is always right.⁴⁶ Moreover, the general will that is understood as "no one in particular," is considered as a will that is not alien to the individual's will but is seen as his or her thought proper.⁴⁷ And though it not a natural law it expresses a possible authentic expression, a freedom more valuable than the freedom enjoyed by natural man. Such a will becomes essential given that in a non-political sphere where people interact on the basis of their own there is always the risk that people may and do change their mind for reasons beyond their control. In such a critical situation, the general will is said to step in, to bring order to the human expressions, safeguarding it from emotional interference.

⁴⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy and Social Contract*, trans. Christopher Betts (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 66.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 68.

6. Heidegger on Authenticity

The word *Eigentlichkeit* as used by Heidegger and translated into English as ‘authenticity’ find its origin in the ordinary usage of the word, *eigentlich* which means ‘really’ or ‘truly’, a term whose roots can be further traced back to the word *eigen*, meaning ‘own’ or ‘proper’.⁴⁸ Translated into simple terms it means ‘ownedness’, or ‘being owned’, or even ‘being one’s own,’ giving rise to an idea of owning up to and owning what one is and does. In course of time, the word ‘authenticity’ has become closely associated with Heidegger and is found in the early translations of his *Being and Time*. Understood in this sense, the word and the term is indicative of the possibilities of owning oneself, of taking responsibility for one’s life in the face of our thrownness.

This conception of ownedness in Heidegger becomes clearer when one enquires into the question of what is it to be a human being. Humans or *Dasein* as he refers to, are primarily not to be confused with any other type or types of objects among other things in the universe but need to be seen as “*relation of being.*”⁴⁹ Here, in saying that this being that is “in question for oneself” is in a relation is to say that in living our lives our being is always “at issue” for the very reason that we “care” about who and what we are. This concern with care is reflected in the relationship that exists between what one is at a given moment and what he or she can be as life progresses into a world of possibilities or projections in the future. Since, our being is always an issue for us we do take a stand on who we are made feasible in the specific stands that we take and in terms of the roles we enact over the course of our lives “from its ‘beginning’ to its ‘end.’”⁵⁰ Given the many possibilities that are available in the act of narration and involves configuring the story we want to tell, this act of *Dasein*, of taking a stand of its own to “become what you are” is comparable to the act of choosing a particular plot and its related events.

Heidegger holds that existence has a directedness or purposiveness which is responsible for imparting a degree of connection to our life stories. It is in these acts of choosing and enacting roles which are seen as an expression of our character traits, we can be said to

⁴⁸ Heidegger passes over “Authentizitat” the German term for what philosophers have traditionally meant by that English term and insists that the term “Eigentlichkeit” is “chosen terminologically in a strict sense.”

⁴⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962 [1927]), 12.

⁵⁰ *Ibdi*, 233.

contribute to constructing an image of what it is to be human. To the extent that all our actions contribute to realizing an overarching project or set of projects, our active lives can be seen as embodying a life-project and in this sense can be said to exist *for the sake of* ourselves.⁵¹ Heidegger employs the word “understanding,” whose German equivalent *Verstehen* has a deeper sense of meaning that implies “taking a stand,” to talk of the act of projection into the future by which we shape our identity.⁵² For the most part, when it comes to the question of our everyday mode of being it can be said that having such a life-plan requires very little conscious formulation of goals or deliberation about the means. So, in our “average everyday” way of being we are and “proximally and for the most part” dealing in the world as the “they” doing what anyone would do according to established norms. A part of the explanation for our competence in living a life as the they is because we as members of a historical culture have in the process mastered to a great extent the art of negotiating our everyday world. This implicit “pre-understanding” makes possible and explains for our familiarity in association with things and others in the world. It is only when we transform ourselves into a “whole” when we gain an “Phenomenological seeing” that this would help us uncover the conceal dimension of our life, our authentic self.⁵³

Nevertheless the reference to the “They” should not be misconstrued as implying a sense of automata for as Heidegger points out even in our conformist mode, what we refer to as “average everydayness” we are constantly involved in making choices that reflect our understanding of who we are. The only difference is that in this mode we are rule adrift and in not taking a stand we act as one of the “herd” or “crowd,” which he refers to as “falling” (*Verfallen*)⁵⁴ At this stage, in failing to take over our own choices as our own we fail to own up to who we are and so we cannot really say that we are the authors of our own lives. And to the extent that our lives are unowned, existence is inauthentic (*uneigentlich*). However, while Heidegger is conscious of the fact that this mode of existence is to a certain extent deeply problematic he is and does not imply that this is “a bad or deplorable ontical property of which,

⁵¹ Ibid., 416.

⁵² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 118.

⁵³ Ibid., 76

⁵⁴ Ibid., 220. The German word *fallen* is used by Heidegger to refer to the fall of Dasein into the ordinary and mundane life. However, this usage does not express any negative notion such as “corruption of human nature or “bad and deplorable ontical property” rather it points to the worldliness of Dasein as Being-in- the-world.

perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves.”⁵⁵ On the contrary, given that there is no escape from the world of social reality, in creating a background of shared intelligibility that lets us be fully human, it plays a positive role. For him, “authentic existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in such everydayness is seized upon.”⁵⁶

In view of this perpetual threat of a “downward plunge,” if Dasein is to move away from the they-selves and realize our capacity for authenticity then it calls for a personal transformation. This is possible only with the experience of certain fundamental insights. A fundamental shift can be in terms of the experience of an intense bout of anxiety. In our experience of anxiety, we suddenly find ourselves with a world that was once familiar and secured breaking down and along with it the significance of things collapsing.⁵⁷ Thus, with the failing of the world that earlier acted as the support system of existence Dasein comes to face itself as an *individual*, standing alone. And it is in these moments, Heidegger's writes, “Anxiety individualizes Dasein and thus discloses it as ‘*solus ipse*’.”⁵⁸ The second transformative event is when the self is faced with the possibility of death that throws open the possible loss of all possibilities. This question of one’s “own most” possibility of our finitude bring to us a realization that we are always future-directed happenings or projects, where what is important is not the actualization of possibilities, but “How” one undertakes one's life. In order to understand what it is to be a Dasein it involves grasping not just the undifferentiated inauthentic mode but also grasping the authentic mode. Perhaps this requirement can be met in the form of giving a full narrative account of the horizons by which our understanding of who we are come to the forefront. The third transformative event is hearing the call of conscience that we are “guilty” or that we have a *debt* (*Schuld*) and are responsible for ourselves. This voice acts as a reminder that we are falling short of our potentialities, and that we need to continue the job of living with steadfastness and full participation.⁵⁹

All the above experience happens within the three “existentialia” that structure Dasein’s Being-in-the-world and explains for the “formal existential totality of Dasein's structural whole”,

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 224.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 186.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 327.

that which Heidegger calls *care*. To be Dasein, an entity must have some sense of what it is “coming toward” (*Zu-kunft*, the German for “future”), what has “come before” (what is “passed”, *Vorbei*), and what one is dealing with in one's current situation (“making present”). The defining characteristics of Dasein's potentiality-for-Being are displayed in the transformative events that lead to the possibility of being authentic (*eigentlich*, as we saw, from the stem meaning “proper” or “own”). When Dasein confronts and grasps its authentic possibility of being, it becomes possible to see the *whole* of Dasein, including both its being as a They-self and as authentic being-one's-self. “Dasein is authentically itself in [its] primordial individualization”, where the “constancy [*Ständigkeit*] of the Self ... gets clarified”⁶⁰ It is important to take note at this stage that what defines the wholeness and unity of Dasein is determined not by an underlying substance (e.g., the subject, that which underlies), but by the “steadiness and steadfastness” (*beständigen Standfestigkeit*, *ibid*) of authenticity.⁶¹

Dasein as a relation of being is characterized by two aspects of existence and understanding that serves as the key to understanding authenticity. To start with, we find ourselves *thrown* into a world and placed in a situation that is not of our own making, with a past behind us that seem to dictate our choices. And the fact that one is generally absorbed in the practical affairs of our daily life, of already “being-in-a-situation,” naturally pushes us towards our everyday falling. However, at the same time, as part of what it is to be human we find ourselves striving toward the end that is crucial to our overarching life-project. Thus, though our present engagements is typically aimed at completing tasks that are necessitated by the need of the hour and the impending circumstances, they are also gradually shaping us into a kind of person that we desire to be. It is in this sense, my “understanding” as futural projection is seen as the structure of being a projection onto one's own most possibility of being.⁶²

So, given this distinction, one can say that in Heidegger's account of human existence, there is freedom in the humdrum sense of doing what I choose to do under ordinary conditions and freedom in an ethically more robust sense. Authenticity is constituted by a sense of freedom understood in the latter sense where Dasein in shaping his or her identity in the way he or she

⁶⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 322.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 322.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 373.

can care about in “choosing to choose a kind of being-one’s-self.”⁶³ It is this condition of being responsible for one’s own existence defined in terms of one’s day-to-day actions that involves *steadiness* and *steadfastness* to a life that one can be said to be responsible (*verantwortlich*).⁶⁴ Authenticity, in this sense is understood as standing up for and standing behind what one chooses and does.

It is obvious that the conception of authenticity discussed above has very little to do with the older idea of being true to one’s own pre-given feelings and desires nor is it to be confused with the conceptions of pop psychology and romantic views of authenticity. On the contrary, the “true self” alluded to here is an on-going narrative construction: the composition of one’s own autobiography made possible through one’s resolute commitment that is realized or made concrete in one’s day-to-day actions over the course of a life as a whole. For Heidegger, feelings and desires forms an important component as are the features of one’s situation, if one intends to advance towards the wholeness of the existing individual. And this wholeness is realized in the unfolding and constantly “in-progress” steadiness and steadfastness story of a life that continues to be built until death. Interestingly, what stands out about this kind of authenticity is that the intent is not about being true to some antecedently pre-determined nature, but *being* a person of a particular sort. In doing so, Heidegger is clear that being authentic presupposes that one’s instantiated virtues as the ideal is not necessarily opposed to an ethical life or a socially engaged existence. On the contrary, authenticity seems to be considered as an “executive virtue” that provide the conditions for the realization of being as a moral agent in any meaningful sense.

7. Sartre on Authenticity

The main contention of Sartre was to “repudiate the *spirit of seriousness*” of traditional philosophy and argue forth that all values are but human constructs, generated in the course of his or her interactions with the world around, in situations that are not of his own creations.⁶⁵ Accordingly, there is nothing such as values that are given, existing independently, transcendent to humans, and essential in defining a thing. In order to understand the nature of human’s existence he begins with an examination of our everyday lives and in the process comes up with

⁶³ Ibid., 314.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 334.

⁶⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992 [1943]), 796.

two particular characteristic features that defines human existence. He notes that humans, to begin with, are similar to the other entities of the world in that they contain concrete characteristics. This makes up for their “facticity” or what he refers to as “in themselves” (*en soi*). At the same time, he holds that we are also unique insofar as we are able to detach ourselves from what is “in itself” through a kind of reflective self-awareness. This kind of awareness makes us capable of putting our own being in question and accounts for the “for itself (*pour soi*)” aspect of humans, distinguishing us from the rest of the entities.⁶⁶

The facticity of life accounts for the facet of “givenness” that we find ourselves with. Often we do find ourselves as “just being there” without any prior justification or reason, with a past, a body and social circumstances that restricts us in what we can and cannot do. This “in itself” does not even have any determinate characteristics, as all determination is contingent on our specific interpretations of things. Yet, while we share this relatively fixed attributes of “facticity” with other entities, what is distinctive about human being is that we can by asking ourselves question, for example, whether we want to be the person whom we are right now or be a person of another sort, introduces a certain distance. Sartre thus defines man as a being who is not what he is and who is what he is not.⁶⁷ This capacity for putting a distance introduces a “not” or a “nonbeing” which allows us to organize the world around us into a meaningfully differentiated whole. This capacity of human consciousness to generate a sense of the “not” differentiate us from the “in itself” and explain for what Sartre calls “transcendence.”⁶⁸ Thus, in surpassing my brute being or my facticity, as transcendence, I am placed with an open range of possibilities for self-definition in the future.

Sartre’s notion of transcendence is closely linked with the idea of freedom as well as authenticity which is related to how we constitute the world and ourselves. We constitute the world to the extent that we, in having the ability to choose how things are to be interpreted, decide how things are to be counted. At the same time, though the facticity of my circumstance initially imposes some restraints on how I am able to project and interpret myself, we in deciding how to interpret those constraints, constitute *ourselves*. In fact what counts as

⁶⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 25.

⁶⁷ Sartre, . He holds that the nature of bad faith is such that it, “cause me to be what I am, in the mode of “not being what one is,” or not to be what I am in the mode of “being what one is.””(p. 110)

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

limitations and how they limit us depends a lot on our exercise of meaning-giving activities and can be fully grasped only in light of antecedent commitments.⁶⁹ He therefore make this sharp observation that “Facts are never brute facts, but always appear across a projective reconstruction of my for-itself.”⁷⁰ So the kind of freedom that he advocates is absolute and radical in the sense that it is our choices and their estimated ends that decides how our situations is to be read as meaningful, as threatening or favorable.⁷¹ Thus, he is of the view that individuals are not only responsible for their identities, but also for the manner in which the world presents itself in our experiences.

Furthermore, the tension between facticity and transcendence runs deep to such an irreconcilable extent that we often end up in what Sartre termed as bad faith. Bad faith is a kind of self-deception, where we, in reducing ourselves to a facticity take ourselves to be a mere thing, thereby denying the freedom to make ourselves into something very different. Thus, when a person rules out the possibility of excluding from his or her view the ability to transform ourselves and escaping from our present predicament Sartre holds that this submissiveness involves a denial of transcendence or freedom. Initially, it looks like one can by making a sincere and deep commitment to something and abiding by that commitment escape bad faith.⁷² However, such sort of belief or “good faith” on its own without the involvement of the question of “not” is doubtful and amounts to little more than another form of self-deception. This is because believing in itself involves some degree of uncertainty and experience have shown that in making a choice, one can never attain the condition of the “in itself”, because what we are is always in question for us. Thus, Sartre holds that “bad faith [always] reapprehends good faith”⁷³ and this in turn seems to suggest that “we can never radically escape bad faith.” However, he goes further in saying that there is the possibility of a “self-recovery of being which has been previously corrupted” that which he calls “authenticity, the description of which has no place here”⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Ibid., 489.

⁷⁰ Ibid.,710.

⁷¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 711.

⁷² Ibid., 114.

⁷³ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Sartre later writes, “Authenticity, it is almost needless to say, consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks it involves, in accepting it ... sometimes in horror and hate.”⁷⁵ His formulation of it is, “he would be right if he recognized himself as a being that is what it is not and is not what it is”⁷⁶

8. Taylor on Authenticity

Keeping in mind the fear of authenticity lapsing into a form of self-indulgence, Taylor attempts to revive the notion of authenticity in arguing that the possibility of such threats do not justify the total condemnation of the idea itself.⁷⁷ He is more in agreement with Rousseau, Heidegger and Sartre in holding that the call for Authenticity is one that involves a life of discovery, realization, and fulfillment about the self. The reason why authenticity is often mistaken for a kind of self immersed narcissistic tendency and is seen as an act of self-indulgence masquerading as a virtue is because we fail to make a distinction between its genuine and debased manifestations. In the attempt to retain and revive the concept of authenticity, while avoiding the “malaises of modernity,” he believes that those traits, that observe the limits imposed by our relationship of interdependence, should be cultivated while those traits of self-appeasing relativism should be weeded out.

The ideal of authenticity derives its strength from the belief that there are always certain characteristics that are significantly distinctive about each one of us, which involves “a certain way of being human that is my way.”⁷⁸ Happiness and contentment lies in discovering and being faithful to these ways which is about being your own “true” self rather than living a life that is in accordance to an externally prescribed plan of life.⁷⁹ It involves creating a unique identity for oneself in heeding to the inner voice, or else we risks the possibility of becoming hollow, the lifeless product of external social demands. It is as Rousseau would say to “die without having tasted life.”⁸⁰ However, the problem with modernism is that while the inward turn still contains a self-transcending moment, it overlooks the fact that authenticity in itself contains an important

⁷⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, (New York: Schocken Press, 1948): 90.

⁷⁶ Linda A., Bell, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1989), 45.

⁷⁷ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 56.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁷⁹ Taylor, *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”*: An Essay (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). 29-32

⁸⁰ Rousseau, *Emile*, 79.

component of self-transcendence.⁸¹ This is because modernism in its failure to come up with a viable definition of the multi-dimensional nature of self is ‘contaminated’ by a form of ‘self-determining freedom,’ that while containing elements of possibilities, inwardness and unconventionality, at the same time has ideals that can render the ideal of authenticity flat.⁸²

The problem with such Self-determining freedom lies in its underlying presupposition that one is free of all external influences when deciding about issues that concerns of the self. In holding that one can independently decide what is best for oneself alone, in total ignorance of the influences of society, it calls for a sort of freedom that obviously goes beyond the constraints of what we know as negative liberty.⁸³ This kind of freedom is not only unwarranted for authenticity but functions counterproductively because such demand of self-centeredness flattens the meanings of lives and fragments identities. Discovering one’s “true” self requires more than passively following a set of internal instructions, it as Taylor has noted involves a process of self-creation and self-expression.⁸⁴ Articulating an identity at the same time involves adopting a relationship which is connected and shaped by one’s membership in a language community and cannot be solely left to an individual alone to decide what is important.⁸⁵

In order to substantiate the claim that authenticity is constituted “dialogically,” through our interactions with others Taylor comes up with a set of two conditions that would serve as the base on which the concept of authenticity is built. Firstly, any talk of authenticity is underlined by the fact that it presupposes the existence of “horizons of significance,” those defining factors only against which particular actions and affirmations stand out as substantial bases of human identity.⁸⁶ In making and deciding upon these choices, Taylor is of the view that one “couldn’t claim to be a self-chooser, and deploy a whole Nietzschean vocabulary of self-making.”⁸⁷ It is not true that the object of one’s choice does become valuable simply by an act of choosing nor is it also true that an action or a belief become significant, simply by willing, otherwise everything

⁸¹ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 15.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸³ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 34–35.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 35–41.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

we do or think would be equally significant. Rather he holds that there is this “background of intelligibility” against which actions stand out as significant a “horizon.”⁸⁸ He thus writes that,

only if I live in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it presupposes such demands.⁸⁹

The call for authenticity also involves another factor, the need for “recognition” or esteem for being the particular individuals we are.⁹⁰ This need for recognition is based on the principle of “equal value of different identities” and stems from the universal need to craft a distinctive identity for oneself. The second factor on which the call for recognition rests is on the importance of intimate relationship. In view of these twin demands, Taylor calls for a state where all individuals are recognized in their distinctive individuality by all others. These conditions cannot be merely implied but must in each case be established, especially in societies where the ideal of authenticity is pervasive.⁹¹ First, the need for recognition becomes inevitable insofar as we are arbitrarily denied recognition for reasons that are unrelated to the rationale upon which the standard rules for our claim to recognition is based. Secondly, given the horizons of our culture, we seek recognition based on esteem for genuinely valuable aspects of character that can, form the foundation of a meaningful identity.⁹²

These conditions usher in a new norm for defining the meaning and fulfillment in life. It follows from the above argument that forms of life and modes of self-expression that obscure these horizons are self-defeating. For instance, one cannot in the search for authenticity, on the pretext of self realisation treat the other simply as instrumental means. The key lies in recognizing the underlying principle that human identities are constituted “dialogically,” through interactions with others.⁹³ It requires that one remains grounded to those collective questions of concerns that point to factors that goes beyond one’s own preferences. Any form of contemporary culture that adopts or initiates standards for self-fulfillment without regard to the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 37.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 40-41.

⁹⁰ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity* 47.

⁹¹ Ibid, 50.

⁹² Ibid., 51,52.

⁹³ Ibid., 33-35.

demands of others or demands emanating from something more or other than human desires cripples the conditions for realizing authenticity itself.⁹⁴ Moreover, the recognition we obtain from others becomes meaningful to the extent that this recognition is given by someone whose judgment and esteem we value.

Therefore, one must resist “the slide to subjectivism” and not close ourselves off to the moral horizons that make meaningful identities possible. This means that one must not subscribe to the idea that there are no sources of value beyond the self as well as the idea of self-determining freedom that everything is permissible.⁹⁵ What one can understand from the dialogicality of human subjectivity is that each of us is to some extent dependent upon others, for both the creation and maintenance of a rich and satisfying sense of personal identity. According to Taylor, if authenticity involves recovering our own “*sentiment de l’existence*,” then perhaps we can only achieve it integrally if we recognize that this sentiment connects us to a wider whole.⁹⁶ One must, he argues, learn to recognize the potentiality of modern ways of thought and culture to articulate genuine truths that concerns our relationship to others, to nature, and to God.⁹⁷ Thus, authenticity not only requires the recognition of concrete others but also a critical engagement with a common vocabulary of shared value orientations.

9. A comparative understanding of Authenticity

The question of authenticity can be said to be in existence, ever since the time of Socrates when he raised the question, How should one live our life? It has a long tradition of history since the time of the ancients, the time when people started to question the meaning of life and found various ways and means to explain and substantiate their findings. It still holds its relevance in the present world and continues to ask the same question, given that we seem to have lost track of ourselves in the attempt to keep pace with a rapidly changing world and its incessant demands. Thus, with exposition to the various ways of understanding the meaning of authenticity as explained by different philosophers, we will in brief see as to how the different explanations stand. To begin with, Rousseau’s conception of authenticity stand out for its treatment of the human subjectivity as a dialogically constituted subjectivity vis-a vis the need for attaining a

⁹⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 68-69.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 91.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 89-91.

stable condition of solitary bliss. Unlike inauthenticity whose sources come from the influences of external factors, the strength of authenticity, he holds originates from the natural self. For him, if an experience is to be counted as authentic it must have a sense of something that is intimate, of personal significance to the experiencing subject only then can we say that it reflects a sense of genuineness, rather than something that is merely “objective.” The rationale behind this condition is because authenticity has its origin in *amour de soi* which is an active and positive force.⁹⁸ It is thus described as an expansive sensibility that fosters emotions and induces an individual to ‘transport himself outside himself’ and drives the individual to look to other people. A distinctive mark of authenticity in his philosophy lies in its qualification that it is only when an individual becomes involved with the lives of others that ‘man begins to truly live.’

However, in the emerging society especially, modern society, characterized by hierarchy, inequality, and interdependence, personal authenticity is often diminished by the need of esteem from others. This is because society was propelled by *amour-propre* or pride and so there was a big gap between human as they are and as they could have been, between expectations and the ground reality. Society in this sense stood not for the victory of reason over alienation but was representative of the culmination of human self-estrangement. All this happened because individuals were driven from without and not within. Thus, in the process Rousseau believed that, if an individual was to achieve a state of happiness and stable relationship he cannot reach them unless he learns to detach himself from the desires and for this natural goodness needs to be supplemented by good will.

For Heidegger too Humans or *Dasein* as he refers to, are primarily not to be confused with any other type or types of objects but need to be seen as “relationship-of-being.”⁹⁹ This is because in living out our lives, our being is always *at issue* and we always *care* about who and what we are. Thus, the self that is in question is realized in form of the particular stands that we adopt, understood in terms of the roles we enact over the course of our lives from the beginning to its “end.”¹⁰⁰ This ideal is clearly reflected in the word *Eigentlichkeit* as used by him, which

⁹⁸ Rousseau, *Emile*, 4

⁹⁹ Heidegger, *Time and Being*, 84

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 112. Here Heidegger is of the view that a reply to the “who” of *Dasein* is answered by the response “self” and this selfhood of *Dasein* which is different from the present-at-hand or an object is formally defined as “a way of existing.”

when put into English is translated as ‘authenticity’ and whose meaning is indicative of the possibilities of owning oneself. Put in simple words, the term authenticity means taking responsibility for one’s life in the face of our thrownness.

Heidegger observes that for most part of our life, in our “average everyday” mode of being, we deal with the world as the “they” doing what anyone would do in accordance to the established norms. So, to the extent that we live our lives in this manner we are unowned, our existence is inauthentic (*uneigentlich*). However, in making this distinction, he does not mean that this is “a bad or deplorable ontical property of which, perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves.”¹⁰¹ Remarkably, for him, authentic existence is understood not as something that is separated and floating above everyday fallenness rather, existentially, it is nothing different from the way in which our everydayness is seized upon in an alternate way. It is only when we transform ourselves into a “whole” by gaining a “Phenomenological seeing” that this help us uncover the conceal dimension of our life, our authentic self.

This unveiling becomes possible only when we have experience of certain fundamental insights. And this fundamental shift of experience happens under certain conditions, i.e., when one undergoes an intense bout of anxiety, is faced with the possibility of death that throws open the possible loss of all possibilities and in hearing the call of conscience that one is “guilty” and owes a *debt* (*Schuld*) and are responsible for ourselves. Thus, Dasein as a relation of being is characterized by two aspects of existence and this understanding serves as the key to figure out authenticity. Here, we find ourselves *thrown* into a world and restrained by circumstances which in the first place have nothing to do with our own choosing and a past behind us that seem to limit our choices.¹⁰² Yet at the same time, to be human is not to be defined by these limitations but to strive toward those ends that are integral to who one is understood in terms of the futural projection of what we can be guided by an overarching life-project which involves of one most possibility of being. And Authenticity is constituted by a sense of freedom understood in the latter sense, where Dasein in shaping his or her identity in the way he or she care about defines

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 220.

¹⁰² Ibid., 178.

who he or she is in “choosing to choose a kind of being-one’s-self.”¹⁰³ Therefore, this striving for finding the “true self” in Heidegger is so much reflective of an on-going narrative construction where the direction of one’s own life is shaped through one’s resolute commitment in choosing what one can be in our day-to-day actions and made concrete over the course of an individual’s life as a whole.

For Sartre, the search for authenticity is based on the certainty that there is nothing such as values that are given, existing independently, transcendent to humans, and essential in defining a thing. Instead, understanding the nature of human’s existence involves understanding two particular characteristic features that defines humans. Humans, to begin with, are similar to the other entities of the world in that they contain concrete characteristics that make up for the facticity or for the nature of “in themselves” (*en soi*). At the same time, we are also unique insofar as we are able to detach ourselves from the what is “in itself” through a kind of reflective self-awareness. This kind of awareness makes us capable of putting our own being in question and accounts for the “for itself” (*pour soi*) aspect of humans, distinguishing us from the rest of the entities of the world. This capacity for putting a distance which comes with the introduction of a “not” or a “nonbeing” allows us to organize the world around us into a meaningfully differentiated whole. He thus defines man as a being who is not what he is and who is what he is not. Accordingly, in surpassing my brute being or my facticity, in transcending it, I find myself opening up to a number of possibilities from which I can choose what I want to be in the future. Thus, we constitute the world to the extent that we in having the ability to choose how things are to be interpreted decide how things are to be counted. And in consequence, individuals are responsible not only for the construction of their identities, but in a way responsible for constructing how the world presents itself to us.

Taylor is more in agreement with Rousseau, Heidegger and Sartre that the call for Authenticity is one that involves a life of self-discovery that involves the participation of the others. The reason why it seems as if authenticity amounts to nothing other than self-indulgence masquerading as a virtue is because of our failure to make a distinction between its legitimate and debased manifestations. The reason for this debased manifestation is because modernism is ‘contaminated’ by a certain form of ‘self-determining freedom,’ that is structured around a kind

¹⁰³ Ibid., 314.

of moral subjectivism which is not grounded in reason or the nature of things but simply adopted because we find ourselves drawn to it. While it is true that constructing one's "true" self goes beyond the act of passively following a set of internal instructions and involves a process of self-creation and self-expression yet at the same time articulating an identity involves an engagement with a language community of which one is a member. The claim to be a self-chooser does not hold ground as neither a belief nor its act become justifiable simply by virtue of one willing it.

Thus, unlike Sartre, who talks of transcendence, Taylor's reading of authenticity is rooted in a web of locution which he says we can never really be transcended. Rather, he roots our understanding of life on certain factors taking into consideration the fact that our existence is conditioned. His understanding of Authenticity is structured "dialogically," in and through our interactions with others in the community. In the process, he points out that there are two sets of conditions that serve as the basis around which the concept of authenticity can be engaged meaningfully. First of all, it presupposes the existence of "horizons of significance" only against which our decisions and choices stand out as substantial bases of human identity.¹⁰⁴ For if in the first place one is to shut out demands that arise from beyond the self then this leads to a devaluation of the defining circumstance in which we shape ourselves and thus lead to a trivialization of the question "who am I?" The call for authenticity also involves the need for "recognition" or esteem for being the particular individuals we are for we are primarily dialogical and not monological selves.¹⁰⁵ This need for recognition is based on the principle of "equal value of different identities" and stems from the universal need to craft a distinctive identity for oneself. Thus, authenticity not only requires the recognition of concrete others but also a critical engagement with a common vocabulary of shared value orientations.

Therefore, if according to Rousseau authenticity originates from the natural self, in the love of the self which he holds is good and inauthenticity as originating from a comparative, false reflection that have their influence from external factors then Heidegger shows that these conditions or everydayness are the situations into which one find ourselves being thrown into. However, instead of falling into this mode of unowned existence which is inauthentic, Dasein in

¹⁰⁴ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 37.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

caring about our being confronts and grasps our authentic possibility of being. For Sartre too, our everyday life is made up of two particular characteristics, one is the concrete nature of entities or the facticity that we share with the rest of the entities and the other is our capacity for transcendence that in introducing the question of “not” allows us to organize the world around us into a meaningfully differentiated whole. Thus, he advocates a radical kind of freedom in showing that individuals are responsible not only for their identities but for the appearance of the world. However, keeping in mind the dangers that authenticity might lapse into a form of self-indulgence, Taylor roots his notion of authentic in acknowledging the fact that the self is a member of a language community. This web of locution is something which one cannot completely transcend for the dual nature of authenticity cannot be understood in abstraction, without reference to its social settings. Rather, only when the question of identity is defined within this “webs of interlocution,” that a meaningful reply to the question who am I comes out clearly. This dialogical relation of the self is conditioned by two defining factors that keep in check the self’s propensity to self-transcend, resulting in it slipping into a kind of Narcissism. They are the existence of “horizons of Significance and the need for recognition based on the principle of equal value of different identities.

10. A Critique of How Authenticity Shapes Narrative Discourse

Having examined the different ways in which authenticity is understood and the role it plays in defining the self, in this section of the work we move a step further in examining in greater detail the question of how a “narrative” construction of identity creates space for the play of authenticity or how the question of authenticity in return shapes the creation and direction in which narrative identity proceeds. One of the reasons why we move in this direction is because in our attempt to engage with the process of identity construction in a narrative, the more we engage with it, the more pronounced becomes the inevitability of the role of authenticity. Moreover, it is equally interesting and important to see how narratives in turn shape the way and direction in which authenticity moves along. Understanding this dialogical nature of interdependence between authenticity and narratives involves dealing with a web of interconnected questions.

While it is true that one can have a better grasp of the self following a narrative engagement with the question of self, there is also the fear that this account of the self may become trivialized as the narrative turns out to be vacuous. Allowing for these limitations, the immediate question that comes into play is what type of a narrative would best serve as an account for a self that is authentic? Stories are human artifacts that involve a process of choosing a particular plot from a set of possible directions it can take. According to this chosen direction there is a conscious selection of events in order to carry forward the narration in the desired way. So the question that comes with such selective engagement is, if at all is it possible to reduce a person's whole life into a single unified narration? How does one ever justify the choice of selecting a particular narrative as a more appropriate alternative over the rest of equally possible interpretations of life? Moreover, given that in light of the chosen direction that a narrative proceeds there is always a tendency to rationalize certain events or aspect of our life over others, how is one to explain for those acts of omission of certain events from one's life while giving stress to certain selected events of our life? Would this not amount to a kind of self-deception that reduces the act of narration to a self-defeating exercise that renders the question of authenticity flat?

A possible reply to the first question is feasible, if in the first place one can make a clear distinction between fictional narratives and real life narratives. The difference between the two narratives comes out clearly if we read carefully into the account given by Rudd. Rudd, in making a distinction between the two narratives points out that talks of actual life situations have intentional actions as their focus.¹⁰⁶ Unlike scientific explanations or fictions whose focus is on an efficient-causal chains, the drive behind real life narratives goes beyond these causal explanations and is concerned with reasons that are provided in support of the teleological intent it exhibits. In addition, the significance of these reasons depends on a much wider network of further related events and actions and their complex relationship, understood in relation to the past, present and the future prospects. Thus, the teleological intent of one's life narrative is based on a much wider network of context than is usually perceived. So, narrativist are of the view that even if one rejects an atomistic account of action in recognition of a "mini-narrative," such as those cases that Strawson's alludes to, a particular instance of making a cup of coffee, it does not make sense without "at least implicitly thinking of them as embedded and deriving intelligibility

¹⁰⁶ Antony Rudd, "Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Narrative Unity—Reply to Lippitt", *Inquiry*, Vol. 50, 5 (2007), 542.

from the person's whole life."¹⁰⁷ Thus, an individual does develop a sense of himself or herself as characters in an ongoing story, wherein current actions are not simply seen as random events but understood as choices in response to the impending situation shaped by the past and the future possibilities.

Again, despite the fact that this kind of temporal weaves of significance are constitutive of a network of shared meaning that exhibits a strong resemblance with fictional narratives, the process of creation and interaction is much more complicated in real life. This is brought out clearly in Taylor's assertion that for any situated action, however trivial it may appear, there is a sense of what we have done, experienced and what our expectations are, understood in terms of our orientation towards what we call the "direction of our lives."¹⁰⁸ Each action, in making sense of our authentic self, can be said to gain its meaning from its place within the agent's entire life story. And this capacity for commitment to future actions that constitutes an essential part of our agency is irreducible to mere physical occurrences. Thus, intentions are not distinct atomic phenomena but "exist only in the wider context of a mind." Coherence by normative guidance is the constitutive basis of intentional action. So, even when these intentions and the acts thereof are said to be incoherent we talk of their being incoherent in the light of and against a background of coherence.

Because a human self is constituted dialogically, Taylor argues that we create our own distinctive identities in large part through our exchanges with others who not only introduce us to our native language, but who also teach us "the 'languages' of art, of gesture, of love, and the like."¹⁰⁹ Not only do we for the first time learn these cultural "languages" from others, but we also continue ever after to define ourselves using at least some of the terms and concepts we have acquired from our interactions with others. He holds that there is nothing such as a complete transcendence from this web of locution. Even in those exceptional cases where we in cutting off our ties with the pasts are said to have dramatically transforming and shift our moral and intellectual inheritances we still indirectly are connected to it. We cannot be said to have completely transcend this circle for, even though we are supposed to have cut off our connection to the language community into which we were born, our thoughts and feelings are mediated by

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 543.

¹⁰⁸ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 47.

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 33.

the cultural “languages” we have inherited. This is because our new web of locution is understood more or less in relation to or against that web of locution which we have earlier acquired from others and claim to have transcended.

On a similar note, Michael Bratman for instance writes that “our purposive activity is typically embedded in multiple, interwoven quilts of partial, future-directed plans of action” within a typical hierarchical structure with “proximate ends embedded in future ends.”¹¹⁰ This he asserts constitutes connections of “meanings” rather than causes or mere similarity with the initial intention referring implicitly to its later execution and vice versa. A similar observation is made by Flanagan, who holds that not only do we live in time and appropriate memories of our past we also navigate towards the future with attentiveness to the long-term plans. David Velleman also in reference to Bratman notes that when it comes to questions concerning life, the current motives and instrumental belief in themselves are insufficient to settle an individual’s future course of actions. So he in seeing this need “to maintain correspondence between his story and his life” is in favor of a narrative account of practical identity.

On the contrary, significant objections against this kind of practical identity, modeled around narrative theories that have for their basis a mimetic relation between life and story, have been raised with complaints that one often ends up confusing life for literature. Bernard Williams, for instance, sees ambiguity with the stand that the whole process of living is comparable to a kind of social storytelling wherein the selves are seen as coauthor of life’s narrative. He thus writes that, “when MacIntyre says that the narrative structure of action is prior to people’s narrations, does he mean that it is prior to fictional narration, to any artful narration, or to any telling at all?”¹¹¹ According to him, the narrative structure of a complex human agency cannot be said to be in existence prior to it being told by the agent himself or herself. This is because what makes a story good or interesting is because that particular account is altogether prior to any telling at all. Thus, he interprets MacIntyre’s comparison of life to an act of storytelling as references to cases

¹¹⁰ Michael Bratman, *Faces of Intention: Selected Essays on Intention* (New York: Cambridge University press, 1999), 5.

¹¹¹ Bernard Williams, “Life as Narrative,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 17, No. 2, June 2009, 306.

of artless telling where narration is prior to artful telling rather than those cases where narrative is prior to any act of telling at all.¹¹²

Nevertheless, given the fact that one cannot identify narratives about a person without any prior concept of personhood, he argues that some “idea of the coherence of a person’s life” has to precede even artless narration. Following this one can argue that since narrative structure and personhood are not reducible to one another they are not mutually interdependent phenomena, and so one cannot expect to apply the conditions of the latter on the former. Based on this ground, he rejects MacIntyre’s proposal that “the unity of an actual life is like the unity of a fictional Life.” Fictional characters are artifacts that are not living at all and have no future.¹¹³ Moreover, the “I am” in MacIntyre’s account is not entirely determined by the social relations or unchosen attachments that is there before one begins one’s life and so in actual life we are not fully determinate character as it is with the case of fictional characters, until life is done.¹¹⁴ Thus for him, “the idea of a completed, unified, or coherent narration is of no help in leading a life. The idea of living a life as a quest for narrative is baseless.”¹¹⁵

However, on a careful examination Williams’s objection against MacIntyre’s comparison of a person’s identity with a fictional character is built around a faulty presupposition that narrative identities can only be constructs resulting from explicit acts of telling. Therefore, the implication is that real life narratives cannot be compared to fictional characters who are from the beginning “a given whole.”¹¹⁶ But this is a strong claim, for even in cases of literary characters, in following a good story, we often see that the characters are confronted with situations in which they could have gone either way, the right path or its opposite at those decisive junctures. So, the stories involved include accounts of struggles with making the right choice, given a particular circumstance and of forking through telling situations just as in real life.¹¹⁷ Thus, while taking into due consideration the fabricated nature of such fictional characters, one can still feel the

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid, 310.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 311.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 312.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 311

¹¹⁷ John J Davenport, *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Morality: From Frankfurt and MacIntyre to Kierkegaard*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 51.

compatibility of the dramatic tensions that is similar to the ones that we undergo as we live our life in real time.

Next is the objection that literary characters unlike that of a living person are usually finished products and usually “come into being only through being described.”¹¹⁸ One can in response to this objection point out that life is comparable to a theatre except for that we are more actively engaged. While experiencing our life as a story, though we cannot be an omniscient observer, in the sense of having a first-personal “experiential dimension” as Zahavi puts it, yet we become an intimate audience of our story as the gap between the two becomes blurry in real life.¹¹⁹ As our life stories continues we really can make a difference in how the story proceeds for we have the added advantage of “a mix of author and protagonists.”¹²⁰ Rather, it is in being placed in such kind of position that one can choose for oneself narratives that are clearly reflective of one’s own self and one’s own value, which at the end amounts to an authentic telling of our own story. The error underlying Williams skepticism lies in the assumption that anything that continues like a story must be told if not by others then by the agent himself. The objection, Carr explains, derives from the belief that “narrative structure requires not only a temporal configuration of events but also a narrator and a possible audience.”¹²¹

This is reflected in the view of objectors to narrative identity like Lippitt, for whom, “the real difference between ‘art’ and ‘life’ is not organization versus chaos, but rather the absence in life of that point of view which transforms events into a story by telling them.”¹²² He is of the view that, in case of narration, it is only a few who even attempt to tell the complete story of their lives. In addition, he also holds that except for some important sequence of events most of the people have numerous accounts of the same narrative implying that there is nothing such as a narrative that is unique to one’s life. For him “no narrative I could ever tell about my ‘whole

¹¹⁸ Peter Lamarque, “On the Distance between Literary and Real-Life Narratives,” in *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, ed. Hutto, 117-332, 120.

¹¹⁹ Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005), 114-115

¹²⁰ Johan Brannmark, “Leading a Life of One’s Own: On Well-Being and Narrative Autonomy,” in *Preferences and Well-being*, ed. Serena Olsaretti (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 67.

¹²¹ David Carr, *Time, narrative, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University press, 1986), 59.

¹²² John Lippitt, “Getting the Story Straight: Kierkegaard, Macintyre, and Some Problems with Narrative Unity,” in *Inquiry* 50, No.1 (February, 2007), 45.

life' could ever . . . make it a 'unity' in any full and robust sense . . .”¹²³ So, self-deception becomes almost inevitable in “telling the tale” of our lives as artful “telling” involves processes of embellishment and omission. These objections poses a problem for narrativists as it draws wide open a gap between the unedited stream of experiences that are non-narrative and the stories that in trying to unify the events select and in the process distort the contents.

However, one can in reverting to Heidegger find a reply to these objections who argues that “life has a narrative structure before there is any explicit attempt to put that life into the form of a story.”¹²⁴ There is a distinction between the story as it is told in a given biographical narrative and the actual happenings of the individual. One can say of the biographical story to be truer or more false as it corresponds to the story-like structure of life. Nevertheless, it can be said that a person’s whole practical identity is constituted by a primary narrative that is founded on prereflective or first order meaning –connections, while secondary narratives tell us about or try to make sense of the primary life-narrative of a person. In this sense one can say that the basic human capacity to create stories that are fictional or so is because these stories are derived from our experiences which then becomes the primary narratives, so “life is the basis for every possible story that can be told about it.”¹²⁵

For someone like Ricoeur too, the “world of action” already has a quasi-narrative form that lend itself to “narrative configuration.” It is not simply chaotic as it appears to be but has a kind of structure of its own, an “inchoate narrativity” or “prenarrative structure” which is “not reducible to simple discordance.”¹²⁶ And in this sense, life in its practicality is already “schematized” in a way that makes it narratable, allowing us to recount it employing means such as plot, settings etc that account for aspects of a coherent story. In this sense, Zahavi understands Ricoeur as saying that a self-narrative is not “a way of gaining insight into . . . an already-existing

¹²³ Lippitt, “Getting the Story Straight,” 48.

¹²⁴ As quoted in Guignon, “Narrative Explanation in Psychotherapy,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 41, no. 4 (January, 1998), 568.

¹²⁵ Guy Widdershoven, “The Story of Life: Hermeneutic Perspectives on The Relationship between Narrative and Life History,” in *The Narrative Study of Lives*, ed. Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich, (Sage Publications, 1993), 1-20.

¹²⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellaur, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 74.

self.” On the other hand the self is first constructed in and through the narration.¹²⁷ However, for Carr, he fears that this way of resolving the basic contradiction between lived time and cosmic time in a narrative throws open the gap between narrative and life, as it conceives of the latter as an extralingual reality that is inherently more discordant.

Besides, for Ricoeur, “between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental... . Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode.”¹²⁸ The way how the plot is to be structured is already found to be encrypted in a pre-understanding of the world of action and this explains how historical time can mediate between lived time of subjectivity and objective or cosmic time.¹²⁹ The correspondence between the two is one of analogy, where “what really happened” was itself like a narrative in form, though the historical account is a “reconstruction” of the actual “course of events”: a metaphorical relation.¹³⁰ This Ricoeur holds help prefigure the best narrative that can be told about, making it possible to “render its due” to the past. This complex “interweaving of history and fiction, aided by the imaginative “seeing-as,” can help reveal ethical truth because the past is not just a series of physical events but a developing web of actions and sufferings. This helps clear the fear about narratives as having their origin in a form of self aggrandizing exercise and thus giving rise to inauthentic construction of identity by the self. Rather, it is in those selective acts of narration or acts of “refiguration” that brings together seemingly discordant events into a cohesive unit that makes “this life itself a cloth woven of stories told.”¹³¹ Especially, given “the elusive character of real life ... we need the help of fiction to organize life retrospectively.”¹³² At the end for Ricoeur “narrating is a secondary process grafted on our ‘being-entangled-in-stories.’”¹³³

Again, for someone like Carr, historical narratives in recounting the lives and events, need not falsify the experiences because independent of our contemplating the past, there is a narrative

¹²⁷ Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), 105.

¹²⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 1, 52.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 153-154.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 162.

¹³³ Paul Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 30.

structure that underlies and informs our experience of time and our social engagements. Rather he holds that literary narratives naturally lend themselves to narrative configuration as they “arises out of and is prefigured in certain features of life, action, and communication.”¹³⁴ In this context, he is more in agreement with Husserl that parts of our extended experiences are in correspondence to parts of the temporally extended processes in the world.¹³⁵ Thus, familiar experiences like, serving a tennis ball are not to be understood as composed of atomic parts but as consisting in a single process that is both psychological and physiological with interdependent phases and with passive experiences classified as events and activities as actions. Thus, even in what we know of as pre-reflective lived time there exists something like a distinctive pattern between a “setting” and a plot. And given the fact that there is an end and a means by which we strive to achieve it, action as well as events are said to be characterized and experienced as temporal gestalts with a beginning, middle and the end.¹³⁶

Moreover, while Carr himself admits that there are important differences between lived experiences and narratives that imitate it, he holds that the differences are not so sharp as implied by the critics for whom there is no selection in lived experiences simply because there is no narrator. Thus, for him,

Narratives do select; and life is what they select from. But it hardly follows that in life, no selection takes place. Our very capacity for attention, and for following through more or less long-term and complex endeavours, is our capacity for selection. Extraneous details are not left out, but they are pushed into the background, saved for later, ranked in importance. And whose narrative voice is accomplishing all this? None but our own, of course.¹³⁷

Thus, while it is through intentions that the stream of experience is narratively schematized, it is through this kind of storytelling that we explain our acts to ourselves. For him, our narrative structure is not something that is imposed on a hind sight or *ex post facto* by reflection on atomic

¹³⁴ Carr, *Time, Narrativity and History*, 9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29. Following Husserl, Carr writes that the stream of consciousness is thus “lived as a complex of configurations whose phases figure as parts within larger wholes.”

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³⁷ David Carr, “Discussion: Ricoeur on Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 165.

events for “Narrative coherence does not impose itself on an incoherent, merely sequential existence, but is drawn from life.”¹³⁸

11. Finding a Ground in Aristotle

For Taylor art is “no longer defined by imitation, by mimesis of reality, art is understood now more in terms of creation ... I discover myself through my work as an artist, through what I create . . . and through this and this alone I become what I have it in me to be. Self-discovery requires poiesis, making.”¹³⁹ Aristotle too considered art as something that is not simply imitative but can give insight to nature and could “lift up and beautify by bringing some individual thing up to its complete form.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, he holds that the product should be choiceworthy as the product cannot be detached from the producer since it expresses the being of the producer. He observes that “Now the product is, in a way, the producer in his actualization; hence the producer is fond of the product, because he loves his own being. This is natural since what he is potentially is what the product indicates in actualization.”¹⁴¹ The same holds true in case of our identity construction, in the process of narrating who we are, we primarily choose the narrative that is reflective of us. Accordingly, out of the many possible options available before us, in structuring the narrative in the desired direction which we can take, we choose to include or omit those events that are authentically reflective of who we are.

In holding that “art partly completes what nature cannot bring to a finish” Aristotle shows that there is indeed a subjective as well as an objective end to art. Its function does not merely end with bringing into existence entities like statues or paintings but its concern is also with nurturing those parts of our nature or an individual’s character that were yet to be actualized. The function of art is not to be restricted to its purely objective end that is concerned with a realization of the essence or eidos in concrete form, but when “dealing with particular arts, such as poetry and music, [Aristotle] assumes a subjective end consisting in a certain pleasurable emotion.”¹⁴² So, the experience of beauty, for Aristotle is not limited to those areas where there

¹³⁸ Carr, “Ricoeur on Narrative,” 166.

¹³⁹ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 62.

¹⁴⁰ *Physics* II 8, 199a17).23

¹⁴¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross (Kitchener: Batoche Books), IX 7, 1168a6-9.

¹⁴² Samuel Henry Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art: With a Critical Text and Translations of the Poetics* (New York: MacMillan, 1898), 207. He writes that “The subjective emotion is deeply grounded in human nature, and thence acquires a kind of objective validity.”

is a free play of the imagination irrespective of intellectual content. This observation holds true in our daily life too as any art for that matter, in its finer details, is more appreciated by the one who is trained in that discipline and has its own practical applications. This gives credence to the fact that it is possible for art to validate knowledge and inspire intellectual commitment. In holding so, Aristotle is careful of the fact that not every action or production gives us this sense of actualizing ourselves, it is only those actions which are more authentic that concomitantly give a sense of being.

In the same manner, in the case of narratives too, life is what narratives are made of and narratives in return are reflective of life. When we actualize ourselves in a manner that is in agreement with our ideal, then we experience the pleasure of existence in living our life authentically. This exercise of self-actualization, of discovering yourself, creating yourself, is not something that is pre-given or preexistent, nor is it something that come out of nothing but is comparable to a beautiful piece of art work that is painstakingly crafted. The process of articulating who you are, understandably positioned within the larger context of the society into which you are “thrown,” and “transcending” the limitations that imposes upon you and restricts your choice to express yourself is of greater challenge. Thus, the process of articulating oneself authentically in a narrative requires not just courage and conviction but also demands a fair play of moral imagination if one is to avoid the pitfalls of narcissism that leads to inauthenticity.

CHAPTER 3

THE TRUTH OF IMAGINATION

1. What is Imagination?

Speaking of imagination the picture that immediately conjures up one's mind is that of a work of poetry, a play or an artistic creation, things that can be classified more into a fanciful world of dreams, fantasy and imageries. In comparison to the world of sciences that is involved in the serious business of knowledge production, with its painstaking determination of experimental facts backed by strictly rule governed theoretical inferences, imagination seems to have no significant role.¹ The closest that imagination came to be defined in terms of the world of knowledge generation were either that of in classical philosophy, which saw it as the faculty of producing copies of sensible objects and the romantic view of it as an irrational, arbitrary, creative power capable of generating entirely new objects, concepts or symbols. All these changed when Kant against the empiricist's claim that images are produced by means of our receptive sensible capacities made a striking claim that 'something more' is required. He identifies this something more with the synthetic activity of the imagination. He argued that "There is thus an active faculty of the synthesis of the manifold [of sense] in us, which we call the imagination... For the imagination is to bring the manifold of intuition into an image"² (A120). This declaration of Kant about the role of imagination totally changed the course of the history of imagination and thereby that of epistemology. Imagination was no longer relegated to the fringes, today it is seen as playing a vital role in the process of knowledge generation.

Imagination can be broadly divided into two kinds depending on the function they perform. The term reproductive imagination is designative of the capacity of imagination to reproduce mental images of objects and events which it has encountered earlier and experienced while the productive imagination signifies the power of imagination to construct images of objects not previously perceived. Imagination also seems to be possessed with two incompatible

¹ This is often a problem associated with natural sciences, an issue which is found addressed by Taylor as well as Ricoeur in their dialogue in "Discussion: Ricoeur on Narrative," where they both point to the limits of an explanatory model or a nomologically hermitic model where the merit of particular cases are subsumed under the general law. Thus, Taylor is of the view that "explanations by non-significant structures can alone suffice for the human sciences is to lapse into a more or less scatter-brained reductionism." (Taylor in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 178).

² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. and trans Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A120.

qualities, on one hand, imagination is said to be equipped with this ingenuous capacity to create objects that are either non-existent or absent which allow us to escape from the limitations of everyday life. On the other hand, it also is said to empower the subject to reconstitute the world. Thus, the existence of this two seemingly contradictory functions is what goes onto constitute it and will be addressed in this chapter. However, following this brief exposition of its function, we shall see below how the role of imagination has evolved from one seen as a blind faculty of imitation to one that is responsible for “opening up a world” in Ricoeur’s own words,

Our conclusion should also ‘open up’ some new perspectives, but on what? Perhaps on the old problem of the imagination which I have carefully put aside. Are we not ready to recognize in the power of the imagination, no longer simply the faculty of deriving ‘images’ from our sensory experience, but the capacity for letting new worlds shape our understanding of ourselves? This power would not be conveyed by images, but by the emergent meanings in our language. Imagination would thus be treated as a dimension of language. In this way, a new link would appear between imagination and metaphor.³

Following this brief introduction to the issues surrounding the concept of imagination before we get into a more detailed discussion I will at this point briefly sketch an outline of what the chapter intends to do. In the first section of the work the focus would be on how the concept of imagination has over the years evolved from a faculty that has nothing to do with the production of knowledge but was at best busy reproducing images to one that is actively engaged in producing knowledge. Following which we shall examine in greater details how Kant’s theory of imagination was responsible for turning around the fortunes of imagination from its reproductive to productive function. This will be followed by an examination of what constitutes the unreal, following Ricoeur’s understanding of the role of imagination in narrative employment. In the next two sections, the focus will be on the discourse of how Imagination functions in Sartre’s as well as Ricoeur’s work in creative and providing an alternative possibility, that of an unreal world. And in the last section we will deal with how a better understanding of narrative imagination necessitates the need for resorting to moral imagination if one is at all to engage in a

³ Paul Ricoeur, “Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1981), 143.

meaningful narrative construction of one's life, which will be built up for the following chapter.

2. A History of Imagination

At the outset it would be insightful to begin with a sketch of how the meaning and concept of imagination has over the years evolved. The intent is not just merely to chronicle the changes in the usage of the word "imagination" but also perhaps to convey something much more fundamental. It would mirror the growing recognition of the diversity of the human powers of knowing and creating, and hence the expanding horizon of possibilities before him or her. Generally, when one speaks of the works of imagination, the image that immediately conjures up people's mind are creations that are either poetic or artistic works. This is in stark contrast to the world of sciences that is governed by specific methods, rules and a painstaking determination of the experimental fact following the process of a tightly governed theoretical inference. Following which the rest of the discussion of this chapter will focus on the way in which creative imagination that was once associated exclusively with the work of poets and artists finds its place and role in the sphere of narrative construction of identity.

To start with, the recognition of imagination as a distinct human faculty to create, finds its mention in the works of thinkers as early as Plato and Aristotle and later in the works of writers like Cicero and Augustine. Francis Bacon, for instance, makes a distinction between sciences as the work of reason as opposed to poetry which has to do with the work of imagination. The reason how the notion of imagination itself first came to be associated in particular with the free-ranging territory of arts lies in how it came to be formulated.

Plato, for whom the world of senses is only a faint copy of the world of forms, in trying to understand the activity of knowing, is said to coin the term *phantasia* in reference to how things appear to us in perception, memory, even in dreams and hallucinations.⁴ The term *phantasia* in this sense is derived from the term *phainesthai* meaning "to appear," which already carries with it the connotation of things that falls short of reality and therefore is characterized by

⁴ Plato, *Timaeus. Critias. Cleitophon. Menexenus. Epistles*, trans., R. G. Bury Loeb Classical Library, 234. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 70-77.

the possibility of illusion. As for Aristotle, the term *phantasia* refers to a power that is common in all animals. In his writings, imagination is often defined as a neutral ability to generate the representations on which perception and thought depend. Its instrumentality are reflected in the view he holds that neither perception nor thinking would be possible without it, as thinking is in part *phantasia* and in part judgement.⁵ However, though Aristotle's assessment of the epistemic role of sensation is more positive than Plato's, his treatment of *phantasia* also suffers from the same sort of shortcomings for holding that such representations can also be found in dreams or in optical illusion and can therefore deceive. He is of the view that the term *phaine tai êmin* or "we imagine" is a term employed only when one is in doubt about what he or she proposes.⁶ Thus, the term imagination remains unclear as the distinction between the act of mere appearance and that which happens in our mind, when we think, is often confusedly clubbed together.

Perhaps, it is to Augustine that we owe the Latin term *imaginatio* and hence the term "imagination." Primarily, imagination for Augustine is not in itself a faculty but a product of a faculty he calls *spiritus*. This is because sensation as such is a purely physical activity and for the act of knowing to occur the action of the spirit is needed. Thus, imagination becomes the intermediate between the senses and intellect. Consequently, it plays a part in all knowing and possesses a degree of freedom in visualizing all sorts of strange objects by combining various features of different things previously perceived. Yet, these things are in principle ultimately limited by what is perceivable. And so *imaginatio* as product of construction can be a source of illusion. There are accordingly three types of image construction; the first is images of things actually perceived, the second of things not perceived and the third of numbers and measure.⁷

Later Aquinas, too, holds that the power of imagination is an essential intermediary between the senses and the intellect. He puts together a remarkable account of it starting from that what was given in the *De anima* by Aristotle. According to him, the intellect cannot understand anything without turning to *phantasmata* produced by the imagination in response to the activity of the senses. Thus *phantasmata* becomes a central element in all forms of knowing. In addition to this, he also considers imagination to have two other functions. One is to serve as a

⁵ Aristotle, *De anima*, 427b28 in *The Works Of Aristotle: De Anima*, trans. J. A. Smith, M.A., LL.D. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931).

⁶ *Ibid*, 428a 11-12.

⁷ Augustine, Letter to Nebridius, in: St. Augustine, letters, New York, Fathers of the Church, 1951, pp. 16-1

storehouse of the forms received through the senses and the other is to conjure up images. However, Aquinas' definition of this constructive function ends here, he brings nothing new to it. Imagination, in this scheme of thing features simply as a common functioning of the knowing power which is unimportant compared to his primary project of understanding the nature of knowing faculty.

Later on, Francis Bacon divided knowledge into three parts memory, imagination and reason. Correspondingly, in his scheme of knowing he assigned history to memory, poesy to imagination and philosophy to reason. Poesy was something that was placed in between memory and reason and under it was assigned not just poetry but literary construction of any kind that relied on constructive imagination. However, as this kind of knowledge was not governed by the laws of the matter, it was said to enjoy the autonomy to join that which nature have separated and separate that which nature had joined.⁸ So, at the end, the knowledge that comes from imagination was considered as feigned history as things were created more to amuse the reader.

Thus, throughout the course of the history of philosophy, Imagination featured simply as an element in knowing. This is true even in case of Descartes, who can be credited for ushering in an era in philosophy whose primary concern and preoccupation was with epistemology. However, understood within the proper framework of his epistemological scheme, the role of imagination was not secured, since its area of operation was with the senses which he sees as being deceptive. Thus, Descartes in comparing imagination and intuition writes, "intuition is very different from, the misleading judgment that proceeds from the blundering constructions of imagination."⁹

Hume too in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, in holding a view similar to that of Descartes writes that, "Nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers."¹⁰ However, he later turns around and compares the general and more established properties of the imagination with

⁸ Francis Bacon, *The advancement of Learning*, ed. G.W. Kitchin (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974), 82.

⁹ Rene Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, trans. Haldane And Ross, *Philosophical Works*, Rule III, 7.

¹⁰ David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. I. Part IV, Sec. vii, ed. P.H. Nidditch, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 267.

human understanding. He holds that when sense impressions on losing their original liveliness become ideas, it is imagination that recalls these and relates them to one another.

However, unlike his predecessors for whom the role of imagination was inconsequential, the contribution of Kant in understanding the nature and power of imagination becomes very important. He, apart from recognizing the reproductive and productive capacities of imagination comes forth with another new cognitive ability of imagination. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant like the others identifies imagination as endowed with two capacities, i.e., the reproductive and productive functions.¹¹ But, it is in *Critique of Judgment* that Kant reveals imagination's creative ability as having a role in reflective judgments and instrumental in the development of novel meaning. Correspondingly, whereas in the first Critique imagination is seen as something that is subordinated to understanding, in the third Critique it is seen as operating alongside understanding. For Kant, aesthetic ideas like those of poetry, painting, music and architecture are the product of constructive imagination. However, even in his scheme of things imagination despite being known as having a constructive role, it is seen as being limited by the range of the senses themselves and does not produce determinate knowledge of empirical objects. This comes out clearly when he writes that "No matter how great an artist, and even enchantress imagination might be, it is still not creative, but must get the material for its images from the senses."¹² But, despite these limitations that are inherent in his treatment of Imagination, it become important to discuss in greater detail his contribution to a study of the role of imagination in the field of epistemology.

3. Imagination in Discourse:

A. Reproductive and Productive Imagination

Kant's theory of the imagination, as pointed out earlier, in contrast to his predecessors who relegated imagination to the narrow confines of make-believe world, conceives of it as a more pervasive mental capacity. It finds its place not simply in the cognitive sphere of life, but in aesthetic, and moral aspects of our lives. In holding so, he accordingly makes a distinction of the

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. Bernard (New York: Haffner Press, 1970), B- 138.

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Mary J. Gregor, (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974), 45.

role of imagination from different viewpoints. In terms of the level of activity, imagination can be said to operate between the empirical and transcendental world and understood in terms of its engagement with various activities, it can be said to operate between productive and reproductive imagination. This underlying unity also explains for the difficulty that one encounters in trying to understand an account of imagination with the vast range of activities it is said to exercise.

His fundamental definition of imagination is that it is “a faculty for representing an object even without its presence in intuition,” and stands for intuitive, sensible representations of object that are not immediately in front of us.¹³ Apart from this representative function of standing for objects in the physical sense, the definition of imagination also includes its ability to produce sensible representations of objects which are not present in virtue of being intellectual objects, e.g., concepts and ideas. Thus, imagination plays an important role in bringing something non-sensible to bear on our sensible representation. Basically, it has the prowess to produce images that can fill the space between what is sensible and what is non-sensible or intellectual, on the other side. The mediating role of imagination, Kant writes, includes,

The power of imagination (*facultas imaginandi*), as a faculty of intuition without the presence of the object, is either productive, that is, a faculty of the original presentation [*Darstellung*] of the object (*exhibitio originaria*), which thus precedes experience; or reproductive, a faculty of the derivative presentation of the object (*exhibitio derivativa*), which brings back to mind an empirical intuition that it had previously.¹⁴

In the first *Critique*, Kant speaks of imagination’s power that is concerned with its ability to produce sensible representations of an object that is not immediately present in front of us, in one of the two ways, i.e., reproductive or productive way. In terms of reproductive imagination, presentations are drawn from our experience of the past, for instance, when I relive a past experience of the presentation of a painting that I saw last week. In case of productive imagination, it functions as the original source of presentation when it allows us to experience particular things or events in general possible, for example, the novelist’s creation of a character in his play and the act of bringing it to life. Taking into account the two different ways of

¹³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 151.

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. R. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7:167.

producing things, as noted above, we can say that imagination for Kant, in general, consists in its capacity to mediate between the sensible and non-sensible world and in sensibly representing what is not present in either a productive or reproductive way.¹⁵

Examining the way imagination functions and the role it plays, it is important to note that for Kant, what we call cognition can arise only when intuitions supplied by sensations and concepts supplied by understanding come together, neither one of them in the absence of the other, in isolation, can give rise to cognition. Following this assertion, question can be asked as to, how can sensibility that “is immediately related to the object” be combined together with a concept that is “mediately” related to the object “by means of a mark” so as to give rise to cognition? Is there a common ground where the two can come together? In reply to these questions, Kant in holding that imagination partakes both the nature of sensibility as well as that of understanding points out that, “Both extremes, namely sensibility and understanding, must necessarily be connected by means of this transcendental function of the imagination.”¹⁶ He argues that this imaginative synthesis takes place in different forms of cognition, it can occur in both an empirical and reproductive way in perception as well as in a transcendental and productive way, opening the way for the possibility of experience in general.

Following this exposition, Kant, unlike the empiricist, insists that the act of perceiving is not a passive process that depends on sensibility alone. It requires the synthesizing activity of imagination to bring together intuitive representations, in order to form a distinctive type of perceptual representation, which he then refers to as an ‘image.’ In talking of the inevitability of imagination in perception he writes,

No psychologist has yet thought that the imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception itself. This is so partly because... it has been believed that the senses do not merely afford us impressions but also put them together, and produce images of objects, for which without doubt something more than the receptivity of impressions is required, namely a function of the synthesis of them.¹⁷

¹⁵ Samantha Matherne, “Kant’s Theory of the Imagination,” ed. Amy Kind, *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2016), 55-68.

¹⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A124.

¹⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A120.

Talking of perception, the term “image” for Kant does not represent a single instant as is the case with a snapshot image of it but a single, multifaceted sensible representation that includes the different perspectival appearances of an object perceived from multiple standpoints and across different points of time. The empirical synthesis required for such an image he asserts results from the so-called “threefold synthesis” of apprehension, reproduction, and recognition.¹⁸ This process of synthesizing representation involves and allows us to “call back” images that are of the past and unite them with what we are representing here and now. Kant in comparing this process of the synthesis of reproduction with the empiricists’ notion of ‘association’ suggests that the laws that govern the practice of association are “merely empirical.”¹⁹

However, the empirical syntheses of apprehension and reproduction of imagination is not restricted to empirical reproduction, it is made possible even in terms of the transcendental synthesis of the productive imagination. It is through a synthesis of this kind that experience in general is made possible, especially understood in terms of establishing the affinity of appearances and the objective reality of the categories. Kant argues that imagination in figuratively synthesizing together the a priori forms of intuition, i.e., space and time, and the a priori concepts of the understanding, i.e., the twelve categories is said to bring about a special act of transcendental synthesis. And this synthesis not only grounds the affinity of appearances but also grant objective reality to the categories. The other kind of synthesis where the sensible intuition are subsumed under the pure concepts of understanding is made possible through a special type of “mediating representation” produced by imagination which he calls as “schema.”²⁰ This schema is constitutive of rules and procedure by means of which imagination brings the relevant sensation and concept together. However, these schemas are generic and are not to be confused with the images which are but particulars representation of it and of which we have discussed under reproductive imagination.²¹

B. Role of Imagination in Aesthetics and Morality

Again, the role of imagination in Kant is not limited to the sphere of cognition, in forming productive and reproductive perception and transcendental synthesis of productive imagination

¹⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A97.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, A100.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, A138.

²¹ *Ibid.*, A141.

but it has its role in aesthetic and moral spheres. In his analysis of the aesthetic judgment, in the third Critique, he defines aesthetic judgment as a kind of judgment that is concerned with beauty which is different from the cognitive judgment for it is grounded in subjective taste.²² The kind of pleasure that derives from such kind of judgment is inter-subjective, sharable and “enlivened through the mutual agreement” and results from the freeplay of imagination and understanding.²³ Particularly, in this type of judgment, the role of imagination is no longer restricted to that of synthesizing agent responsible for binding together the manifold apprehensions but as a “productive and self-active” agent is free to explore and experiment with the numerous possibilities which can be arranged in diverse ways. Thus, the nature of imagination involved here is one of “free lawfulness” where imagination despite the lack of a guiding concept still accords with the demand of “understanding” that there be unity. Its role becomes more pronounced in the creative act of a genius. The explanation for this is because the natural talent of a genius lies in acting “in accordance with principles that lie higher in reason... nature can be transformed by us into something entirely different, namely into that which steps beyond nature”²⁴

Considering the role that imagination can play in morality opens us up to the question of how can the existing gap between nature and freedom be bridged. In relation to this quest, rational ideas to begin with are defined as those ideas that involve conceptualizing things or ideas that lie “beyond experience” for instance ideas like freedom, the highest good etc. And the objects that correspond to these kinds of ideas are never given in intuition and yet these kinds of ideas find representation in the works of artists. It is through these artistic creations and expression that the rational ideas are given the “appearance of an objective reality,” presentable in sensible ways. Another way in which imagination can be said to provide a passage between nature and freedom is in form of its engagement with acts of deliberation that are conducive to questions of morality. In this case, Kant for instance, brings in the example of how an image of the handmill can symbolically stand for and serve as a representation of despotic rule following an observation of how a cranking of it by external forces sets the “passive” gears into motion.²⁵

²²Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 5:203.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5:218.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5:314.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5:352.

Such comparative analysis becomes possible given that the symbols are now understood as imaginative presentations that “invite a pattern of reflection in us that is similar to the pattern of reflection the relevant concept calls for.” It helps us develop our power of moral reflectivity.

4. The Structure of the Irreal

A. The Irreal Phenomenon

The discussion above about the history of imagination brings to focus two comparative but different pictures concerning the role of imagination. On one hand, imagination is identified with its power to create either non-existent or absent objects, which is different from the actual state of affairs. This function of imagination with its potentiality to break free of the limits of what is actual and what is real can be said to be empowering. It in transporting us to non-existent worlds, which are entirely cut off from actuality and provides us the way out from the confines of everyday reality. In this sense to the extent that it helps us free from the bondage of our surroundings, it can be said to give us a profound sense of freedom. This understanding of imagination is often referred to as the utopian tendency of imagination. In such cases, “what is given in imagination remains without place within the horizon of actuality.”²⁶

On the other hand, apart from this general function of providing an escape from the boundaries of actuality, imagination can also be said to empower, to reconstitute the world. If imagination is compared to a dream like state with reference to its earlier function and definition, then in this latter function of imagination “the dream in question is not content to remain in a dreamlike state—it strives to be realized.”²⁷ It provides us with an alternative to restructure the reality around us. This powerful force of imagination with its potentiality to reshape the very world that encompasses our everyday actions, feelings, and thoughts is referred to as the constitutive tendency of imagination.

On a careful analysis, now it appears that Imagination seems to be qualified with two incompatible capacities one to escape and to suspend, the other to form and to build. As a result of these contradictory qualities we are confronted with an apparent paradox, the paradox of

²⁶ Saulius Geniusas, “Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur’s Philosophy of Imagination,” *Human studies* 38, Vol 2, 2015, 223-241, 225.

²⁷ Ibid.

irreality. Here, the dilemma that we are faced with is that though we simultaneously recognize the powers of imagination to transform reality we cannot doubt that imaginary objects are unreal. At the same time, in confronting this contradiction, one cannot simply in order to resolve the issue dismissed off one of them as that would involve paying a price that is too heavy. Thus, we are faced with a paradox that is similar to what Husserl calls “the paradox of subjectivity.” He writes:

How can a component part of the world, its human subjectivity, constitute the whole world, namely, constitute it as its intentional formation, one which has always already become what it is and continues to develop, formed by the universal interconnection of intentionally accomplishing subjectivity, while the latter, the subjects accomplishing in cooperation, are themselves only a partial formation within the total accomplishment? The subjective part of the world swallows up, so to speak, the whole world and thus itself too. What an absurdity!²⁸

So, just as we are faced with a dilemma in case of the paradox of subjectivity so also are we faced with a dilemma in the form of the paradox of unreality. It is absurd to see how imagination that has placed the subject outside the world is also responsible for placing it in the world? However, the way out of this dilemma lies not in trying to resolve the paradox, but in recognizing its inevitability and thus its irremovability. The answer lies in realizing that the seemingly irreconcilable determinations of suspension as well as constitution belong to the very essence of Imagination. Thus, in addressing the issue of the paradox of unreality our concern is not to deny imagination of its two apparently contradictory roles. Rather an attempt will be made to see how the apparent paradox can serve as a transcendental clue in providing an insight into the operations of imagination. The question before us is what does the paradox of unreality reveal about imagination? In order to understand how imagination must be like placed in such a seemingly paradoxical form we will take a recourse to a comparative study of how the question of unreality has been addressed by Sartre and Ricoeur in their accounts of the imagination.

In dealing with the questions that addresses the issue of how imagination figures in those philosophical discourses that are concerned with action Ricoeur begins with the admission that the concept of imagination is beset with a series of difficulties and paradoxes. The problem starts

²⁸ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David C. (Evanston: Northwestern University press, 1970), 179-178.

from the way how the word “image” itself is understood, following its misinterpretation and misrepresentation in the empiricist theory of knowledge. A lot of issues arise from how the term imagination is employed in popular theories of creativity. Thus, he points out that there is a need for an in-depth explanation of the problems that seems to be disturbing the philosophy of imagination if one is to clear the mistrust harbored by philosophers in welcoming the “return of the outcast.”²⁹ First of all, the term “imagination” itself invokes a picture of “arbitrary evocation of things” that are not present at the moment but are somewhere else. It also is designative of things like picture and portraits which despite having a physical presence stands for or is intended to “take the place of” the things they represent. Again, the term is also used for things which are not just absent but also of things which are non-existent. It is also equally applicable to the sphere of illusion, images which are there for the subject but are absent or non-existent for the outside observer.

As a result of this multiple usage of the term and the resulting confusions over it, the various theories of imagination instead of clarifying this radical equivocacy of usage have come up with rival theories. In order to understand the range of the theories involved, Ricoeur classifies them into two broad categories, with reference to that of the subject and the object. With respect to the object, classification can be made on the basis of its presence or absence and with respect to the subject, the division is made on the basis of fascinated consciousness and critical consciousness.³⁰ Viewed from the point of the object and its presence, the term “Image” is indicative of the trace or lesser presence of that which is perceived, so it is aligned to reproductive imagination. Viewed from the point of absence, the image is of other-than-present and one can talk of productive imagination with reference to portrait, dream and fiction. Again, viewed from the point of the subject, the division is made on the degree of belief involved. In the first place, when an image is confused with the real object and mistaken for it as a result of the lack of critical awareness then one is talking of fascinated consciousness or *mutatis mutadis*. On the other end of the spectrum, imagination can instead function as “the instrument of the critique of reality” and to illustrate this he refers to the transcendental reduction in Husserl.³¹

²⁹ Paul Ricoeur, “Imagination in Discourse and in Action,” 119

³⁰ Ibid 120

³¹ Ibid.

Following these multiple divisions of imagination at various levels, the question that Ricoeur raises is, can these oppositions be considered as a reflection of the weakness of the philosophy of imagination itself or is it to be understood as a part of the structure of imagination itself that is in need of an explanation? In reply one can say that the way out of this dilemma lies not in approaching the question of phenomenon by way of perception, i.e., the conventional approach of moving from perception to image. Rather, Ricoeur holds the functioning of imagination should be understood in terms of a particular usage of language that is to be found for instance in the theory of metaphor. This idea of “semantic innovation” in going against the traditional notion that “we only see images in so far as we first hear them” is not in agreement with the view that an image is an appendix to perception.³² This leads us to an all important question that, “If an image is not derived from perception, how can it be derived from Language?”

B. Metaphor as an Analogy of Unusual Predicates

In reply to the above question, Ricoeur picks an instance of a poetic image, as the paradigmatic case, wherein an image is said to result from a particular work of language following certain procedures. This is to show how a discourse can generate the imaginary. The key to this possibility lies in the shift in attention from concerns that deal with change of meaning at the simple level to one that involves a restructuring of semantic field at its predicative use. This is precisely where the use of metaphor becomes handy, i.e., “when a new meaning emerges out of the shambles of literal predication that imagination offers its own special mediation.”³³ In addition, metaphor can also be said to perform another function that of giving a contour, a face to discourse.

First and foremost, taking a cue from Wittgenstein’s “seeing as....” the process involves restructuring our semantic fields or grasping the similarity not in terms of “a deviant use of names” but basing it on the resemblance of unusual predicates. For instance, nature is talked of as with reference to a temple. The meaning of metaphor in this example lies “in the rapprochement in which the logical distance between far flung semantic fields suddenly falls

³² Ibid., 121.

³³ Ibid., 122

away, creating a semantic shock which, in turn, sparks the meaning of metaphor.”³⁴ Following this work of predicative assimilation, he holds imagination to be a method rather than content, as its function involves schematizing metaphorical attribution.

In making a comparison with the Kantian schema, Ricoeur points out that this comparison of predicates gives an image to an emerging meaning just as the schema gave an image to a concept. He holds that, “Imagination is the apperception, the sudden view, of a new predicative pertinence.”³⁵ This is visible in one’s experience of reading, where as a result of the phenomenon of reverberation or echoing, the schema can be said to produce images in turn. Likewise, imagination is said to “radiates out in all direction, reanimating earlier experiences, awakening dormant memories, spreading to adjacent sensorial fields.”³⁶ Thus, the poet, who for instance, in creating and giving form to images with the employment of language as the medium is compared to an artisan, whose work is concerned with language.

The result of this reverberation is said to bring about a note of suspension. It introduces a neutralization effect, a negative moment in the process and so the whole process of development falls under the domain of the unreal. So, the function of the image is not limited to spreading meaning over diverse sensorial fields as perceived earlier but also to hold meaning suspended in this neutralized field. Ricoeur, thus sees imagination as “a freeplay of possibilities in a state of uninvolvement with respect to the world of perception or action.”³⁷ It is in this state of uninvolvement that we experiment with new ideas and try out new ways of being. However, this state of unreality with its new ways of being is an impossibility as long as imagination as a faculty is not connected to that of language.

Now, it looks like language in this creative language of the poets is concerned only with itself and so the question is could it be true that these utterances can have a sense without having a reference? In reply, Ricoeur points that a subscription to such a view would amount to seeing half the truth. This is because the neutralizing function enables the possibility of a condition of an affirmative force to be deployed by poetry in terms of the reference. Indeed, what is eliminated or held in abeyance is simply the ordinary language reference which allows for “a

³⁴ Ibid., 122

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 123

³⁷ Ibid.

deep seated insertion in the life-world to emerge.” The transition needs to be comprehended more in terms of a movement from sense to reference “in fiction.”³⁸ Fiction in this sense, he holds, exhibits a double valence where in being directed to nowhere it can be said to stand for reality as a whole. This new reference effect explains why fiction is able to “redescribe” reality. Ricoeur holds that understood in terms of their Heuristic force, fictions are to poetic discourse what models are to scientific discourse, that is they have the competence to open up and unfold new avenues of reality while keeping in suspense our earlier beliefs.³⁹

While the traditional way of philosophy holds that images are but faded perceptions of reality, the interesting thing about fiction is that in cutting off perception the possibility of expanding our vision becomes more viable. This enables us to recreate reality at a higher level of realism. This “iconic increase” that allows fiction to expand outside of itself is made possible through the employment of abbreviations and articulations. It is also, according to Ricoeur, responsible for the possible transition from discourse to praxis.⁴⁰

C. Fiction and Practicality

The move from the theoretical to the practical begins with providing ourselves with a fictional representation. This can be seen clearly from Aristotle’s writing where tragedy is said to “imitate” action “only because it ‘recreates’ it on the level of a well-structured fiction.” Thus, for Aristotle poetry is more philosophical than history as the latter is concerned with the ordinary course of action or that which is contingent, but the former is able to connect *mythos* and *mimesis*.⁴¹ Similarly, we can in our narratives, both in telling as well as recounting a story, apply this dialectic of fiction and redescription. The referential force of narrative lies with the fact that through the application of its “narrative structures” which is a well thought of structure it articulates the diverse human actions. This is the point where narrative can be said to interpose its schematism of human action or its heuristic force between narrative possibilities and human action. However, the function of imagination is not limited to this mimetic act of applying its schema to action, it also has its projective function which in turn constitutes part of the dynamics of action.

³⁸ Ibid., 124.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 125.

To start with, studies of the phenomenology of individual actions shows that there is no action without imagination and this becomes apparently clear in terms of one's projects, motivation and in our very capacity to act. While considering a project in hand, there is a sort of schematization of the ends and the means involved, this is normally referred to as the schema of the pragma.⁴² And it is in anticipation of the action that needs to be done that we "try out" different practical possibilities keeping in mind the future project. This is where one can say that there is an overlapping of the pragmatic 'play' with that of the narrative 'play.' In addition, imagination, in providing a platform, the milieu, in which we can compare and contrast motives ranging from desires to ethical demands, acts as the motivational force. It in providing a mediating space of a common fantasy, provide us with factors that push from behind as well as forces that compels from the front. This provides an individual with the enabling power to say "I could do this or that, if I wanted to." Finally, it is in imagination that we can test our ability to do something and so assess our capacity to do what "I could" do. So, in general, imagination functions as the ground of what is possible in practice.⁴³

This understanding of the possibilities of what freedom of imagination could consist in is closely associated with an individual's freedom of creating and defining oneself. However, the scope of what imagination can do does not stop with the individual's freedom, it find its place towards the social imaginary or that of intersubjectivity. The theory of imagination does not only transcend the literary examples of fiction as is with the case of fiction but even that of individual volition and action. On these lines, Ricoeur takes the help of various analogical constitutions in order to create a meditating ground for the possibility of historical experience in general. Following this direction, a historical field of inter-subjective experience, for instance, becomes possible when my temporal field is paired with another's temporal field of experience understood not only in terms of contemporaries but in terms of predecessors and successors, along which the transmission of traditions happens.⁴⁴

Again, history is not restricted by all this encompassing flux but is also seen as a response to a higher order, a transcendental principle that parallels the Kantian "I can." This higher principle of analogy holds that each of us can exercise "the function of *I* just as *any other* and

⁴² Ibid., 126.

⁴³ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 127, 28.

can ascribe his experience to himself” and “the other as another self like myself.” This coupling of the other as another, just like myself, explains for the genesis of a new connection, an intersubjective relation. This transference in the imagination of my “here” to your “there” is what amounts to empathy understood in terms of love as well as hatred.⁴⁵ Therefore, the task of productive imagination also involves avoiding the “terrifying entropy in human relations” while preserving and identifying the “analogy of our ego.” While it is important to maintain the difference between the course of history and the flow of events, we as part of the historical experience cannot remain unaffected by the effects of history. At the same time, Ricoeur is very clear on this matter that our capacity to be moved in this way depends to a large extent on the way, we can, stretch our imagination.⁴⁶

5. Imagination in Discourse: Sartre

A. The Irreal World

For Sartre knowledge is not to be understood as a remnant of past experiences that is reproduced by imagination but is “the active structure of the imagining consciousness.”⁴⁷ Rather than being understood as simply the content of the imaginary object, as was conceived earlier, knowledge is an ongoing form of its constitution, this becomes visibly clear when one is talking of reading-consciousness. In talking of the role of imagination, Sartre, for one, is one of the thinkers who talks of the non-mimetic notion of imagination. In his book, *The Imaginary*, he talks of reading-consciousness as an illustration of a conscious act that is not aimed at objects that are absent. Rather, he shows that what the reader wants is not much of restoring or representing objects that are not there but intends an “irreal world.” On the same lines, in *What is Literature?* he also talks of the act of reading and writing as examples of productive imaginative activity. He is of the view that in an engagement with the act of writing, neither the writer nor the reader is simply interested in dealing with a reality that is already given but both are involved in constituting a world with the help of their respective imaginative acts.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 128.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 129.

⁴⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary*, trans. J. Webber (London: Routledge, 2004), 61.

The act of reading is talked of as a process of discovery where one in reading progresses toward that which is yet to happen and in doing so, unfold a yet unfamiliar world. This discovery of an unknown world that is revealed through the act of reading is neither comparable to that of perception nor to that of mental images but an irreal world.⁴⁸ The difference between an irreal world and that of a pictorial imagination lies with the fact that in case of the latter, images are said to be contemporary with their consciousness, in the sense that the images reveal at once all that they possess. However, in an irreal world, the object of concern is not contemporaneous with its image; it is revealed in each moment of reading and unfolds gradually as reading progresses. Moreover, in case of pictorial imagination, an image-consciousness is a self-enclosed unit that is “given to intuition in one piece.” However, on the contrary, in an irreal world, each moment of reading contributes to and gradually builds on previous and future acts, which is different from the way an image-consciousness is built.⁴⁹

Unlike image consciousness, reading is built upon the synthesis of the present moment, the earlier moments and on the future anticipation of what is yet to come. Reading is not exhaustive but involves a backward movement and forward projection as one progresses. So what was read before is interpreted in the light of what we read now, and what we read now is interpreted in the light of that which is anticipated. Knowledge results from the synthesis of these moments of reading into a meaningful whole, an act that accounts for the appearance of a new world, i.e., the imaginary world of the novel. Thus, interestingly, the experience of reading cannot be compared with the abstract world of thinking but that of imagining and we as readers are put in the presence of characters or things that are neither abstract nor have encountered in our experience. They are irreal for they materialized only as reading advances and their realization shapes what is expected of in the future.

Knowledge in this sense is a particular scheme, not a general or abstract projection that guides reading. It allows the reader to bridge the gap between the signs of the text and the concrete, irreal objects, i.e., entities that become concrete as reading advances. So reading as such involves moving beyond the pictorial model of imagination and is described by Sartre as a hybrid consciousness that involves “half-sign and half-imagining” that gives rise to irreal

⁴⁸ Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 64. Sartre describes reading as a consciousness that is hybrid and calls it “half-sign and half-imagining.”

⁴⁹ Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 11.

object.⁵⁰ The creative power of imagination lies in its ability to intercede language and images and it is through these linguistic signs, in gathering disjunct pieces of meaning into a unified whole, that an irreal world is created. So, what is intended by imaginative consciousness is not a world full of images of objects that are absent but the creation of an irreal world mediated by language. Thus, Sartre writes that

In this world there are plants, animals, fields, towns, people: initially those mentioned in the book and then a host of others that are not named but are in the background and give this world its depth. These concrete beings are the objects of my thoughts: Their irreal existence is the correlate of the syntheses that I effect guided by words. That is, I effect these same syntheses in the manner of perceptual syntheses.⁵¹

B. Creative Act of Reading

Even in *What is Literature?* Sartre talks about the productivity of imagination as the synthesis between the work that is written and the act of reading it. The creative act of writing is for him “only an incomplete and abstract moment in the production of the work” as it is in the act of reading that the signs of the text are unified. Reading exceeds writing to the extent that it is a form of labor that consolidates the text, resulting in the construction of an imaginary world.⁵² Therefore, what is irreal is not static but “exists only in movement” as the act of reading itself is. It is also not a fixed replica of something existing elsewhere but dynamic and extended over time. Reading is always a constant movement toward something that is not yet given but created through the joint effort of the author and the reader.⁵³ Thus, Sartre writes, “Readers are always ahead of the sentence they are reading in a merely probable future which partly collapses and partly comes together in proportion as they progress, which withdraws from one page to the next and forms the moving horizon of the literary object.”⁵⁴

The imaginative activity does not ground its creations on a pre-determined matrix of possible circumstances that are on offer. Rather according to him, the imaginative creation

⁵⁰ Ibid., 67. Sartre writes that “to read is to realize contact with the irreal world on the signs.”

⁵¹ Sartre, *The Imaginary* 64.

⁵² Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature? and Other Essays*, trans. B. Frechtman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 51.

⁵³ Sartre, *What is Literature?* 50.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

composed by the reader is an “absolute beginning.”⁵⁵ He holds that human freedom strives for the literary object as its end and in the course of this striving, imagination, accordingly employs the freedom of consciousness in constituting the text. Imagination is linked with freedom in the sense that it allows consciousness to withdraw from the world and detach from itself which enables us to “suspend the actual.” Following which, it in its creative aim not merely to replicate the given world order forms a new reality.⁵⁶

Therefore, understood in terms of linguistic innovation, the literary object is what imagination constitutes in synthesizing the past, the present and the future moments of reading into a totalized whole. So, the unreal is not a simple amalgamation of words that are discrete but the configuration of particular words that gains meaning, viewed in totality of the imaginary horizon of the narrative considered as a whole. Neither is it to be understood as a correlate of the author’s intentions since the act of reading do not involve a one to one interface between the author and the reader. Rather, it is a holistic, imaginative meaning that is created and is responsible for providing each particular word its “orientation” and place in relation to the text. Hence, Sartre concludes, “the literary object though realized *through* language, is never given *in* language.”⁵⁷

C. Productive Imagination and Narratives

In Sartre’s conception of productive imagination, in addition to the pictorial or sensible moments, as discussed has a linguistic dimensions backed by a unique temporal structure. However, by emphasizing on the immediacy of self- consciousness, it might appear as if Sartre rules out any notion of mediation. Initially, it seems likely that the theory of self in Sartre precludes the possibility of comprehending the self in terms of narrative. But the notion of narrative identity understood in terms of relationship between fiction and life, recounting and living occupies Sartre’s work and this can be seen clearly in his novel *Nausea*. Though the work itself does not qualify as a work of philosophy yet it is able to demonstrate the importance of imagination and narrative in the articulation of one’s life as it carries with it much of the rich insights of philosophy.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 54

⁵⁶ Sartre, *What is Literature?* 63. Sartre writes it is “through the various objects which it produces ... the creative act aims at a total renewal of the world”

⁵⁷ Ibid.

The novel while talking about the life of Antoine Roquentine and his struggles to infuse a sense of meaning to his life throws light on the need for narrative in life. It is about the diary entries of Roquentine's everyday life in Bouville and is reflective of his failure to build a meaningful life as a result of his narrative-failure. Here, he wishes to see his life clearly, organize it properly and endow it with a meaning. And so in this endeavor to see his life clearly he decides that "the best thing would be to write down events from day to day."⁵⁸ However, in examining himself, he does not see his self, for even his image no longer appears human but has turned out to be uncanny and estranged, bordering "on the fringe of the vegetable world, at the level of a jelly fish."⁵⁹ He finds that he is not able to recapture the successions of event, was not able to distinguish what is important and so his life as a whole disintegrates.

His life being gradually emptied of meaning was filled by a sense of "absurd." By absurd he means the nauseating feeling with the disintegration of all meaning and the experience of a realization that reality as such is a whole and undifferentiated mass of being. He not only fails to recognize his own face but other familiar objects and situations. He saw his own memories as "strange images" and was finding it difficult to relate them to episodes in his own life.⁶⁰ Thus, what Sartre was trying to show through this portrayal of the character was that a lack of an organizing narrative structure can lead to a total collapse of the very fabric of life. Life without a narrative is nothing but a bare collection of events, sequenced but random in occurrences.

Roquentine's failure to arrange the different episodes of his life and elicit meaning from it results from his failure to exercise his imagination. This failure to exercise his productive imagination deprived him not only of the ability to imagine back and forth, but also the ability to see the past in the light of the present and the present in term of future possibilities and so he could not reflect upon his life. Thus, he was not equipped to see life in its narrative settings, the purpose of which is not to present the truth of life nor falsify it but is primarily intended to transform life. In writing about life and thus articulating it one can endow it with a meaning and claim it back as one reflects upon it. However, Roquentine in his efforts to draw a meaning out of his life fails, on account of the fact that he as a historian attempted to report it without exaggerating it, describe it without interpreting it and write without projecting. In short, in his

⁵⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. L. Alexander (New York: New Directions, 2007),1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 17

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 226

eagerness to describe life he failed to see its explanation. So, in ruling out the contributions of imaginative projection and reflection he failed to see that the facts of life do not simply add up to explain the meaning of life. Thus, he becomes disenchanted with his resolve to document his life for all that he was trying to do was to record it without interfering or interpreting it.

Rather by the end of the novel we find him becoming attracted to writing fiction that would allow him to use his imagination in telling the story; something that would enable him to unify his life and anchor it around a meaning over which the other events of his life would be built around. Thus, Sartre's *Nausea* show us that it take a narrative to configure life's disparate events into a coherent story. That to talk about a life is not enough in simply presenting a sequence of disconnected events but one has to configure them into a meaningful plot with a goal in the end and for which narrative employs imagination. One can see in *Roquentin* the desire to construct his life similar to the flow of a melody where the various moments in time would be unified in a story just as the discrete notes are unified by the melody that flows through them.

6. Imagination in Discourse: Ricoeur

A. Imagination and Emplotment

When we talk of the self as a narrative and of finding ourselves rooted in a shared story, then one can perhaps put it this way that our identity is rooted in constitutive imagination. Identities are basically individual narratives that we form about ourselves as we live and engage with the narratives that reflect our stories. As identities are shaped in the course of our narrative being told and retold, it provides us with plots about ourselves. This configuration is made possible in the form of emplotment. Emplotment, defined in simple terms, consist in the activity of constructive imagination and so it is important at this stage to discuss the role it plays in structuring the narrative.

For Aristotle, the term emplotment (*muthos*) implies two things, “fable” in the sense of a make-believe story as well as “plot” understood in terms of a well-constructed story.⁶¹ However, in talking of narrative identity, our concern with the way term is employed in the latter sense,

⁶¹ Paul Ricoeur, “Life: A story in Search of a Narrator” in *On Psychoanalysis*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 188.

that of a plot, which helps redefine the relation between life and narrative. It is responsible for conferring a dynamic structure on the narrated story. The plot as explained by Aristotle involves an integrative process of composition that explains for the dynamic identity which is said to be complet only in the reader. Ricoeur defines it as “a synthesis of heterogeneous elements.” But in talking of synthesis there are three different kinds of synthesis functions it performs to which he refers.⁶²

To start with, one way of understanding the plot is in the sense of the synthesis of multiple events into a complete story. This function normally refers to the power of the plot to draw a single story out of the multiple events. Here, an event is no longer seen as a mere occurrence or incident that simply happens but is seen as instrumental in the continuation of the story. We begin to see events in terms of their contribution to the progression of the story. Thus, following this observation, we can say that the narrated story is always more than a series of successive enumeration or recounting of events but involves arranging multiple events into an intelligible whole.⁶³

Understood from another angle the meaning of synthesis also involves the way in which the plot binds together heterogeneous elements. The plot is seen as responsible for synthesizing diverse elements such as accidental or expected encounters, conflicting or co-operational relations, means that are in tune with or out of sync with their ends and finally, unintended results. As a result of bringing all the diverse elements into a story the plot can be said to be discordant concordance or concordant discordance.⁶⁴ Therefore, the act of following a story is not reducible to a process of simple progression but a complex operation that is propelled by expectations and their failures, revisions that needs to be made as the story unfolds till it comes to an end. story

Finally, there is this temporal synthesis that happens at a deeper level and has a profound impact in narrative composition and its characterization. In every progression of a story one finds that there are two different kinds of time, one a discrete, open-ended, endless succession of

⁶² Ricoeur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 189. The three features according to Ricoeur are the mediation exercised by the plot between the scattered incidents and the narrative, the primacy of concordance over discordance and the tension between simple succession and configuration.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

incidents and the other, a temporal feature that is characterized by integration, culmination and the ending. The later is said to be responsible for drawing a configuration out of a succession. It is also responsible for bringing to the narrative a temporal identity or totality that can be characterized as “something that endures and remains across that which passes away.”⁶⁵

B. Configuration of a Theme

In addition to this act of synthesizing the heterogeneous that involves configuring a story out of multiple events, Aristotle holds that every well-told story “teaches” something. In doing so it brings out the “universal” aspects of man and this is the very reason that made Aristotle to say that poetry is more philosophical than history. The kind of narrative intelligence that is developed in the process of narration is more closely related to practical wisdom and moral judgment than that of the sciences. As a result of such kind of emplotment that we are engaged with, we become aware of what kind of action would lead to a particular conclusion and thus have learnt to link the virtues with happiness.⁶⁶

In addition, it has to be remembered that the narrative schema has a tradition of its own, a tradition that by no means is to be read as the inert transmission of dead sediment. Rather, by tradition we mean a living transmission of innovations that result from the most creative moments of human imaginations.⁶⁷ Tradition in this sense is understood as dependent upon the interaction of two factors that of innovation and sedimentation. By Sedimentation, we mean those patterns that account for “the typology of emplotment that allows us to arrange in order the history of literary genres” in terms of it being a tragedy, a comedy, a social drama etc., However, in using the term typology these models are not to be understood as constituting eternal essences nor are they to be seen as exhaustive but sedimented history whose genesis we have lost track.⁶⁸ Thus, the usage of the term tradition and its meaning points to the opposite phenomenon i.e., innovation.

Notably, these models of narrative, despite getting developed in due course of time as sedimentation, were at a certain point of time products of innovation and this realization opens

⁶⁵ Ricoeur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 189.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 192

the door for further experimentation. With the passage of time, as a result of the process of innovation, the rules began to change gradually and these changes are often met with resistance or acceptance from the process of sedimentation. Nevertheless, there is always room for innovation and each work being the outcome of a new process is an original production. However, it is also true that in all these courses of development, the work of imagination is not based on something vacuous; innovation remains a rule governed strategy. It is always linked, in one way, to the older models received through traditions that can enter into numerous variable relations with them as innovation progresses.⁶⁹ Thus, the variation between tradition and sedimentation contributes to productive imagination and it is the historicity which keeps the narrative tradition alive.

C. The Role of Imagination in Bridging the Gap between Narrative and Life

It is undeniable that there is always a connect between life and narration. Yet the assimilation of life to a story between birth and death do not simply happen as it is, one has to establish a relationship between them in showing how fiction helps make life. Unless this is done one cannot refute the critics' standpoint that stories are told not lived and life is lived not told. To bridge this gap it becomes important to understand how an understanding of fiction lead us to life. Accordingly, Ricoeur's position that the process of configuration does not end with the text but is completed in the reader that is made possible through the act of reconfiguration, needs to be careful examined. The intersection between the world of the reader and the text vis-a-vis the act of reading becomes an indispensable focus point of our study. A text, to start with, is not an entity closed in itself but it is in the act of reading what the reader appropriates, the implicit horizons of the world that is projected many a times, a universe that is distinct from the one in which we live. However, at the end of the day, this ability of reading to transfigure the reader's experiences and participate in the act of reconfiguration depends on narrative's imagination. If the reader can fuse and participate in both the world of experiences, that of the text and that of his or her own real action it is because of imagination.⁷⁰

Talking about the fusion of horizons, it is important to remember that while analyzing the text there is a limit to the framework of the text, beyond which it cannot be expanded further.

⁶⁹ Ricoeur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 192.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*,193.

However, granted this demarcation point, viewed from a hermeneutic point, an interpretation of the text's literary experience can give rise to an entirely different meaning than that which is apparently contained in its simple structural analysis. This is because hermeneutical interpretation starts where linguistics stops.⁷¹ It calls for a mediation between human existence and the world, between the self and the other and between a human being and himself or herself. In short, it in seeking to establish a relationship between the internal configuration of the text and its reconfiguration in life, it acts as a hinge that connects the two worlds. Thus, Ricoeur is of the view that understanding "the dynamics of composition proper to literary creation is nothing but a lengthy preparation for understanding the real problem, i.e., that of the dynamics of transfiguration proper to the work. ... To follow a story is to reactualize the configuring act that gives it form."⁷²

It is in the act of reading, with its richness for interpretation, that the text finds its ending. In fact, it is in the world of the text, in reading, that we find a way of living the world of the fiction. This finding that stories can be lived and not just told makes us to consider the other side of the critic's standpoint that life is lived and not told. Considering this standpoint, Ricoeur in countering it reminds us that, "A life is no more than a biological phenomenon so long as it is not interpreted."⁷³ In talking of how narrative seeks to imitate life in a creative way, he reverts back to Aristotle's definition of narrative as the imitation of an action, *mimesis praxeos*. A good starting point from where narrative can find its basis in actual experience is the very structure of human acting and suffering. By virtue of our language usage and mastery over it, we unlike the rest of the animals with whom we share the world are not just guided by our passions but are able to guide them and so can act on them. Hence, our narrative does not simply end with recording the succession of events but expresses a *semantics of action*.⁷⁴ This is reason why we in talking of our life's narrative talk in terms of a synthesis of the heterogenous that finds its parallel in the plot of the stories that we are familiar with.

Another instance, in which narrative proposition find its place of mention in our practical understanding of life is in terms of the "symbolic mediation" it brings to the practical realm of

⁷¹ Ricoeur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 194.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

action. According to Ricoeur, the reason why actions can indeed be recounted is because they are already premeditated in terms of rules, symbols and norms. He holds that actions are always to be found symbolically mediated.⁷⁵ This is reflected in our everyday engagements as a particular action can be understood as standing for that particular purpose only when the context of the description is understood. To show how an action is implicitly symbolized, one can for instance take the example of the gesture of raising one's hand and its various interpretations either as a greeting, hailing a taxi or casting a vote, following a good understanding of the context. Thus, before these gestures are interpreted, the symbolic mediations underlying these actions, internal to the actions themselves need to be properly understood. For this very reason one can say that "symbolism confers a first readability on action"⁷⁶ and this explains for why one can say that action becomes a quasi-text.

The other factor where narrative finds its anchorage in life is in the pre-narrative quality of human experience. In talking of life, we often speak of it as a story or as an activity, an incipient story in search of narrative. In such cases, following the story is not limited to the activities of its symbolic mediations but also involves recognizing the temporal structures in action. This is true of our everyday experiences for we see certain chains of episodes or events in our life which are yet to be articulated and so remain untold, stories that need to be told. An instance of such cases would be that of the incidences where and when a judge in trying to understand the accused tries to unravel the knot in which the accused is said to be entangled. Tracing back the background story of the accused before the happenings of the present story becomes essential in such cases. These are the stories from which our present story emerges. Consequently, in analyzing the existential conditions of human beings, the bigger picture that we get is that telling a story is simply a secondary process, a continuation of such untold stories, compared to the fact that we are "entangled in stories." And so telling the stories, following them and understanding the stories is but an unfolding of those as-yet-untold stories.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ricoeur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 196

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

7. Fiction, History and Narrative

In Ricoeur's philosophy, imagination finds an abiding yet often inconspicuous preoccupation mention. It generally is seen as playing the role of a discreet prompter rather than occupying the role of the central performer.⁷⁸ We find the presence of imagination more in terms of its multifarious expression rather than in the form of a direct reference to it. However, the power of imagination does not go unnoticed as it in forming a part of the language structure is said to have the potency to let the new world shape our understanding of ourselves. One of the instances, where we can witness the preeminence of imagination is in the case where an interconnection between history and fiction is made possible through the refiguration of time that is applied to both historical and fictional narratives. Imagination, in such cases, finds its base firmly grounded, precisely in its role as "standing-in-for-the-past" and in its other role as a facilitator for the return from the world of the text to that of the reader.

Despite the fact that the world of history and the world of fiction clearly present two different strands of view, there is a convergence of their imaginative intentionality in narrative at the level of the reader. The concretization of each other's intentionality is made possible in terms of the metaphorical act of "seeing as." This is visible in terms of historical consciousness where we talk of standing for the past understood through the use of analogy or "providing oneself with a figure of." In talking of fictionalization of history, Ricoeur does not stop at the act of configuration, a key role in narrative activity, that narrative imagination brings about. He goes further to show that imagination's also exhibits another important role, i.e., its ability to intend the past "as it actually was." This act of interpolation of narrative imagination into the intending of "what has been of history," according to Ricoeur, is visible in form of the calendar, the succession of generations and the trace.⁷⁹

As far as the calendar and the reading of signs thereof are concerned, this marker brings together the two conceptions of time, i.e., the cosmic time and the human time together. The power of imagination to configure things is such that in assigning dates to potential present or

⁷⁸ Richard Kearney, "Narrative imagination: Between ethics and poetics" in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* Vol 21 No. 5/6, 1995, 173. Kearney in talking of the role of imagination in Ricoeur's scheme of narrative hold that this indirect approach is perhaps a part of hermeneutic detour inspired by Kant's idea that Imagination is a blind faculty albeit an indispensable faculty, an art that is hidden in the depths of nature.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 175.

imagined present, memory become dated events. Thus, the recording of memories as dated events explains for how imagination is able to conjoin, the natural motions of planets on which the physical notion of time is based with the social dimension of events as collective memory.⁸⁰ Again, the relationship between cosmic time and human time also become clearer when one explains the succession of generations. In this case, basically one can situate our own temporality, of extending our recollection in the series of generations, through the chains of memories constructed with the help of calendar. At the same time, one can following the biological phenomenon of successive generations reconstruct a more intellectual phenomenon of relation that consists of contemporaries, predecessors and successors. This combination of a biological component and an imaginative component helps explain how a historical and fictive phenomenon can combine together to bring a deeper understanding of one's life.⁸¹

Another very important phenomenon that can explain how history and fiction are entangled together is in terms of the function of trace. The imaginative mediation that is functional here appears in the form of a "sign-effect" and the kind of synthetic function involved here can be said to be of two kinds. The first kind of trace that we can talk of is with regard to the casual inferences that is deduced as result of the mark that is left behind and the other kind of trace is understood more in terms of the trace specific it leaves behind, something that is "*present* standing for something *Past*." In this case, the configurational activity of "retracing" includes various processes of choosing, preserving, collecting and reading, acts that enable the traces to be seen as "a reinscription of lived time." And the mediating function of imagination that enables one to trace is evidenced in works such as interpreting ruins, fossils, monuments, museum pieces etc. However, the importance of this exercise of traces standing as the agent of historical time becomes viable only in the presence of a reader, who on the other hand, should be at least familiar with a background understanding of the social and cultural context surrounding the relic that at present is missing.⁸²

It is at this stage of reading that Ricoeur supplement his poetics of historical narrative with an ethics of responsibility to the past, in response to the call to respect the reality of the past.

⁸⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 183.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid, 184.

So, in addition to this creative act of reclaiming the past as present, historical imagination also performs the duty of expressing the moment of what-is-no-more to the otherness of the past which ensures that the otherness does not slip into the unsayable. In this case, it is the imaginary that comes to the aid of ethics, in enabling us to recall our debt to the past by providing us with “*a figure of what was.*” And it is through the transfer from same to other, in the act of imagination that the other is brought closer.⁸³ Ricoeur also provides an additional strand in moving past beyond the dated history to the specifically refigured past which can be said to enrich diverse imaginary mediations. This results in enhancing its project of standing for or the “representative function of the historical imagination.” This function is visible in those instances, where the refigurative powers of narrative imagination prevent abstract historiography from explaining away or neutralizing past events or sufferings. Thus he writes, “Fiction gives eyes to the horrified narrator. Eyes to see and to weep. The present state of literature on the Holocaust provides ample proof of this. Either one counts the cadavers or one tells the story of the victims.”

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This poetical power to narrate takes us back to the fundamental question who is the narrator? And Why is there a need to narrate? Narrative identity as we already know operates at two levels, both at the level of the individual as well as that of the community. At the individual level, the narrative structure of personal identity is informed by an ethical import that calls for an examined life free from infantile archaism and ideological dogmatism. The narrative self, the who of the story constitutes an ongoing process of self-constancy that is refigured by truthful as well as fictive stories the self tells about himself or herself. An example of this can be seen in case of psychoanalysis where the story of a life is constructed through “a series of rectifications applied to previous narrative.”

8. From Narrative to Moral Imagination

Now, as we are well aware and have been discussing all along, imagination has an inherently paradoxical structure. It is equipped with the twin capacities that enable us to either flee or constitute one’s socio-cultural world. Its metaphorical function of “seeing as,” in refiguring the past enables us to visualize how things were actually there in the past. This experience of “as if”

⁸³Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol 3*, 183

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 188.

we ourselves were there provide us with a chance to respond to it. However, one cannot help but agree with Kearney that this powerful and evocative medium is equally equipped with the capacity to “serve history as well as subvert it.”⁸⁵ This is because if narrative imagination provides us with an order of self-constancy, it is also responsible for exposing us to imaginative variations that can easily destabilize our stand. Thus, there are complexities as one move from configuration to refiguration. An immediate danger would be to mistake the figural “as if” for a literal belief. The danger of such “hallucination of presence” often gives rise to fundamentalism as we are witnessing today. In such cases, the refigurative powers of narrative imagination works counter in leading to a “ruinous dichotomy between a history that would dissolve the event in explanation and a purely emotional retort that would dispense us from thinking the unthinkable.”⁸⁶

In holding that life is in pursuit of narrative just as narrative is in pursuit of life, one recognizes the fundamental fluidity which narrative imagination brings and that which is built into our identity. Thus, Ricoeur in recognizing the concerns that “Narrative exercises imagination more than the will” can bring, proposes that this shifting ground of narrative imagination needs to be balanced by introducing a sense of ethical responsibility. He holds that narrative identity cannot be not equated with, “true self-constancy except through this decisive moment, which makes ethical responsibility the highest factor in self-constancy.”⁸⁷ And this moment occurs only when the reader in response to the persuasive call made by the text replies “Here I stand!” What this stand is implying is that to the extent that it can propel the self beyond the egoistical circle to a relation of analogy, empathy, or apperception with others narrative imagination is effective. However, this is also true that imagination in itself know no censure, it is in need of a summon to responsibility, which cannot come from itself. Thus, narrative imagination needs to be complemented by narrative will if our aim is to live an examined life that is free from the control of infantile archaism and ideological dogmatism.

The poetics of narrative imagination provides a ground for a responsible self in enabling the self to transcend itself into a possible world. But as Ricoeur has pointed out the role of narrative imagination is limited, it can bring us to the door of ethical action yet it cannot lead us

⁸⁵ Richard Kearney, “Narrative imagination: Between ethics and poetics”, 178.

⁸⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and narrative*, Vol. 3, 304.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

through. The productive function of imagination constitutes a necessary condition for narrative but not a sufficient one. So as Ricoeur writes, it “belongs to the reader, now an agent, an initiator of action, to choose among the multiple proposals of ethical justice brought forth by reading.”⁸⁸ This mode of representation, i.e., moral imagination, involves an enlarged mentality where one can talk of “liberation from one’s own private interests,” without being detached from one’s sense of identity. It is something that opens us towards the other willingly and enable us to imagine oneself in the place of the other without being held “hostage” to the other.

In holding so, the focus of our discussion is not to show that there is a dichotomy between poetics and ethics. Rather the point that we are trying to make here is that a shift towards moral imagination is to be seen as an act of digging deeper into the growing relationship between human art and conduct, an exploration of the middle ground between human insights and his or her actions. The novelty with this approach lies in its intent to account for an ethical understanding of life, one that involves affective as well as intellectual dimensions while constructing a narrative of our life. It in favoring teleology over deontology considers the ethical issue of life more in terms of human aspirations rather than the rules of the law. In doing so, it seeks to extend our understanding of life’s narrative ethics beyond the limits imposed by the formalist categories in grounding our narratives on those exemplary persuasiveness novelties that literary and oral stories offer.

⁸⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and narrative*, Vol. 3, 249.

CHAPTER 4

UNDERSTANDING MORAL IMAGINATION

1. Why Moral Imagination?

Given, a particular circumstance and the possibilities open to us, the question of how we decide and choose what to do matters because such acts of choosing go on to define who we are and determine our relationships with others. Particularly, in our attempt to lead a meaningful life we are often faced with situations that admit of vast array of possibilities and complexity of alternatives that we cannot avoid deciding on them. And it is in such circumstances and the decisions that we make thereof, that points to the fact there can be nothing such as a universal moral rule that is applicable and works in every possible moral situation. This observation contradicts the common perception that moral rules are hard and fast principles that can be applicable to every possible situations. Rather, in differing from such commonly agreed upon observations, moral imagination is said to open up possibilities that heightens our ability to perceive the particularity of a relevant situation and in comprehending the uniqueness of every situation demand that we accordingly address the issue. Moral judgment is not about applying a given rule and making arbitrary choices to address the issue that concerns us; it calls for a good sense of perception, knowledge and action.

In addressing moral questions of complex issues, moral imagination can be said to heighten our ability to perceive relevant situations making us sensitive to situations where we might have been indifferent or unaware of. It is said to be equipped with creative as well as prescriptival elements. The creative function of moral imagination is concerned with the aspect of “imagining how” or the way in which we bridge the gap between moral principles and action. The prescriptival element of moral imagination involves dealing with the question of “imagining that,” with its emphasis on the import of empathy and the ability to disengage from a particular schema in order to be morally imaginative. This perceptive ability that moral imagination brings, to our understanding of ourselves and the situation that we are placed in, allows us to step outside our own narrow scheme of things. It in equipping us with alternative view expands our horizon in increasing the number of possible options before us. The positive function of moral

imagination not only encompasses the moral worlds of individuals but its relevance holds equally true even for the society as a whole.

Nussbaum, for instance, is of the view that there are general principles which guide human in their conduct but which are certainly insufficient for virtue without judgment. Thus, the sensitive discriminating power of perception is needed in the course of recognizing that which is good in a particular context.¹ Such imaginative discretions in making us sensitive to situations give us the ability to frame these perceptions within a set of conditions. Though this kind awareness does not qualify as a source of knowledge *per se*, yet this capacity to perceive the state of affairs enables us to recognize the morally salient in our lives. Likewise, Mark Johnson too, in challenging the conventional perception that moral deliberation involves the application of general and abstract rule holds that moral reasoning involves an imaginative activity that includes “discerning the most appropriate universal moral principle.” Moral Imagination he defines involves “an ability to imaginatively discern various possibilities for acting within a given situation and to envision the potential help and harm that are likely to result from a given action.”² This kind of understanding challenges the dominant view not in the sense of it overthrowing or rejecting the established rule but rather in the way of seeing them not as commands but as rules conducive in guiding actions.

This is where the importance of poetics, in the form of literature, becomes essential in our effort to understand who we are. Literature in giving us a glimpse into the lives of character different from our own or simply of a life we cannot have access to enables us to experience what we could not have experienced. Our engagement with such rich literature enables us to cultivate a rich moral imagination. At the same time, it is also equally true that these imaginings are not something vacuous but extrapolations from our own lived experiences. In this sense, imaginative transactions are both experience constituted and experience constitutive or as Ricoeur would say, language invents in both sense of the word it unites manifestations and

¹ Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 155.

² Mark Johnson, *Moral imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 202.

creation.³ This standpoint is very much reflected in Johnson's writings who argue that metaphor is "the locus of our imaginative exploration of possibilities for action."⁴

Following this brief introduction as to the significance of moral imagination towards a better understanding of our selves, the focus of this chapter is on understanding the nature of moral imagination and the kind of possibilities it throws open. An examination of this will take us to the next level of discussion on how an opening of possibilities defines and redefines one's sense of freedom and how a broadening of the sphere of freedom is responsible for shaping and reshaping one's identity. This kind of identity formation and shaping becomes more viable, understood and articulated, in a narrative framework that employs both the function of poetics and ethics and the role interplay between them. Therefore, in this chapter we will deal with how engagements with narrative imagination in the construction of self-identity eventually lead us to consider the role of moral imagination. Then we proceed to see how moral imagination throws open new possibilities, possibilities of which we never were aware of but which not just broaden our base but even deepens our understanding of ourselves in relation to the other. It can help us to get greater control over our lives in disclosing and bridging the mismatch between what we actually believe are the possibilities before us and what is actually reasonable to believe. It helps us recognize the fact that there are numerous conceptions about what of good life, even within the same society and despite these conceptions being incompatible with one another, one cannot simply say that one conception of the good is right and the other wrong. This we will try to understand better through the works of philosophers like Nussbaum, Taylor and Ricoeur.

2. The transition from Narrative Imagination to Moral Imagination

Before we go into a detailed discussion of what moral imagination as such consists in and what are the roles it can and does play as a result of the possibilities it opens up, it would be helpful at the outset to understand how an engagement with narrative imagination leads to an encounter with moral imagination. Put in Simple terms, one cannot help but agree with Aristotle that every art and every inquiry is thought to aim at some good. Likewise, the first component of an ethical aim is "living well" or the "good life." While it is accepted that imagination is inextricably involved in our human transactions with the world, it is not so easy to trace the relationship

³ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 239.

⁴ Johnson, *Moral imagination*, 35.

between ethics and imagination. The rationalization behind such state of affair is because ethics, in its attempt to uncover the meaning of life, is concerned with a systematic reflection on the complex issues of moral considerations and is apparently far removed from the playful creative world of imaginations that conjures up fantasy. However, a major section of this confusion is removed when one becomes clear of the distinction between what is imaginary and what is imagination. Thus, as it has been pointed out earlier though both are undeniably equipped with the capacity to break reality open for us, that which is imaginary, in dabbling in a world of myths and fanciful images is said to deliberately refrain from direct association with the real world. On the other hand imagination is concerned with ways of dealing with and responding to the world and so is involved in our “knowing” the world.⁵ Thus, as our discussions deepen we shall see that poetics and heuristic functions go along together and creation and discovery are not opposed to one another as we normally assume it to be.

Accordingly, imaginative transactions are both experience constitutive and experience constituted. Imagination in ordering and straightening up the chaotic world of sense experience grants a meaningful structure to an activity. The world “as it is in itself” and significantly reinforced by modern science in its neutral physicality would have been a colourless, tasteless, silent, odourless, corpuscles, had it been stripped of the ‘distinction’s’ of human perspective. This kind of understanding leaves nowhere the question of emotional, moral, aesthetic and spiritual realities. However, in practice it is clear that we cannot detach ourselves from human perspective for reality is always in one way or the other mediated to us through one or the other human perspective and any attempt as such to escape it is ironical. The world that we perceive and experience is embodied and embedded in a historically located symbolic world and to surrender it to the ‘atoms and void’ model of physical reality would be to change the subject. The human world is precisely “the world in so far as it is meaningful and possessed of value for human being.”⁶

Imagination lies at the base of our faculty to recognize and reconstruct the world as a meaningful pattern. To the extent that we experience the world as meaningful, based on the recurrent features of our embodied existence in the world imagination can be said to constitute

⁵ Trevor A Hart, “Creative Imagination and Moral Identity” *Studies in Christian Ethics*, vol 16, no. 1, 2003, 2.

⁶ Anthony O’ Hear, *The Element of Fire: Science, Art and the Human World* (London: Routledge, 1989), 14.

the world. One cannot avoid speaking of the vital role of “metaphysical projection” in structuring human experiences as we have seen in Ricoeur and Sartre in our previous chapter. As against the common assumption, experience does not always remain unreflective and inarticulate but is constantly subjected to some kind of symbolic transformation. At times we articulate that what is in front of us or at times we jumble them deliberately which liberate us from the straitjackets of conventionality.⁷ This can give rise either to a simple reorganization or a very profound and illuminating understanding of the phenomena at hand. But in the process despite these experiments having their base on our experiences and developed according to the nature and order of our experience, they need not merely fit into the system as in the process these experiment one can actually create and structure an experience that better “fits” the world.

Consequently, the world that we know is constituted by experience as well as constitutive of experience. This is what Ricoeur meant when he wrote that language ‘invents’ in both sense of the word, it is equipped with the twin capacity to manifest as well as create.⁸ However, taking such stand does not mean that we are resorting to a kind of subjectivism because to start with, the process of structuring and restructuring occurs in the public domain based partly on pragmatic consideration. Initially, it appears that appeals to experiences recounted in narrative would give rise to a chaotic situation of competing perspectives, with no ways of further appeal to an objective measure in deciding issues when two valid but equally opposing positions are at loggerhead. However, narratives, we shall see, as our discussion progresses, are reason structured which indeed qualifies them to have a legitimate and essential role in ethics. Thus, creative imagination far from being disorganized and disruptive is a responsible extension or expression of ourselves. It is characterized by “the air of rightness that certain more fortunate instances of language and art seem to exude.”⁹

The whole point of imagining and engagement with narratives, involves the appreciation of experiences, identifications, and situations we have not or previously seen or could not have imaginatively understood. This is possible because in narrative imagination one is made to realize the particularity or the concreteness of the situation which an ordinary inquiry might

⁷ This act of deliberately manipulating the symbols to see them differently according to Arthur Koestler is essential to the structure of all human creativity. See Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (London: Pan, 1964), 27.

⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 239.

⁹ *Ibid.*,

simply dismiss as irrelevant. Thus, narrative imagination, art for that matter, enables us to see more clearly what the issue is at hand. In the process, one is constantly trying to imagine, to grasp, and to appreciate what are the appropriate ways of looking at and acting in response to a given situation. An imaginative acquaintance rather than merely dabbling with abstract theoretical engagement of the issue gives a better grasp of the situation at hand. Thus for instance, if one wants to understand in depth the nature of tolerance then one can imagine oneself in the place of, say, Martin Luther King Jr. when he, in stressing on the freedom of speech and liberty, defended the rights of the racists to speak freely. Such appropriate descriptions can help deepen our imaginative understanding of the world and of the possibilities that are available.

Again, through such engagements we may also imaginatively understand and come to learn aspects of the world of which we might otherwise have remained blind to or characteristics we would have otherwise dismissed. Furthermore, such narrative imagination may thus help us in the formation of a better moral understanding in showing us how to evaluate, desire and act in morally fruitful or harmful ways. Therefore, narrative imagination through these imaginings and understanding of representations, widen, develop, and deepen our imaginative understandings of ourselves, others, and our world. It in substantially reflecting our own concerns, goals, values, and imaginative appreciation of the world help cultivate and deepen our ethical insight.

3. The Significance of Imagination in Moral Deliberation

Understanding the way the idea of imagination has evolved over the years from a faculty that was the source of error and illusion to a faculty with potentialities for creative expressions, the question one can ask is, what is its contribution to moral reflection? This becomes more challenging given the fact that moral philosophy is usually thought to be a non-empirical discipline that provides us with principles on how we ought to deliberate and act. In the process, it has to be noted that even those psychological and sociological facts about thinking and acting, though deemed important to the inquiries of social science seems to bear no direct relevance to value inquiry. This holds true specifically in case of imagination that is often considered as a purely subjective capacity with less relevance for practical intelligence. Part of the reason for such understanding is due to the Romantics who were responsible for painting imagination as something that is spontaneous, in variance from reason that is well articulated. However, with

the recent changes beginning with the writings of Hume and Kant on the theories of imagination, the untapped potentiality of imagination is gradually becoming the focus of many philosophical discussions.

Moreover, approaching morality from the standpoint of an imaginative experience does strike many as incoherent. At its best, it may appear as if one is vying for a relativist stance of “anything goes” and at worst, replacing earnest moral reflection with fanciful flights of fictions. However, its role is not limited by this definition as it is said imagination is “our capacity, guided by past meanings, to take in the often bewildering scope of a situation and to transform the present in light of anticipated consequences and ideal values.”¹⁰

Iris Murdoch, in arguing for moral imagination holds the view that not all moral learning and understanding is reducible to matters of general principle as moral reality is necessarily context variable and thus particularist. In such situation, she claims that literature, for instance, enables our faculty of moral perception to become more richly differentiated and discriminating. She holds that morally sensitive individuals are able to see more clearly what is right and wrong, with less doubt, not necessarily because they are more creative, but because they own a bigger picture of life. And since partly our ability to choose is dependent on what is seen, in this case art enables us to see more clearly the situation in hand. Thus, literature and art, which is generally considered as a “by-product of our failure to be entirely rational,” might provide a richer, more inclusive and a superior form of moral inquiry than that afforded by abstract, philosophical reflection.¹¹

Martha Nussbaum also claims that there are certain works of literature which could reveal important features of our moral lives “which the plainness of traditional moral philosophy lacks.” She in arguing against a Kantian approach where moral philosophy is structured around universal principles hold that a moral predicament is not where the moral rules are said to be applicable, but a situation from which moral demands can be said to arise. Resorting to such kind of solution can be detrimental as failure to capture the uniqueness of our situations entails failure

¹⁰Steven Fesmire, “Morality as Art: Dewey, Metaphor, and Moral Imagination” in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 1999, 529.

¹¹ Iris Murdoch, Interview in Magee, B., *Talking Philosophy: Dialogues with Fifteen Leading Philosophers*, 2001, 243

to meet the arising demands.¹² Instead, she in reverting back to an Aristotelean ethics holds that it is in the “seeing of,” being sensitive to the “bewildering moral occasion” that appropriate moral judgments are passed. Ethics as “the search for a specification of the good life” should be concerned more with the nature of question that asks “How should I live my life?” rather than trying to give solutions to those question that are concerned with, What ought I to do? In addition to this, she further holds that literature as such is helpful in broadening the moral sense of the reader, in showing forth how the intuitive moral perception, in response to the sensitivity and alertness demanded by the moral situation works. She writes that a “well-lived life is a work of literary art.”¹³

Again, John Dewey, in going against the tradition of marginalizing imagination argues that thinking itself is imaginative and so our capacity for having a conceptually coherent world is imaginative through and through. He holds that “The imagination is as much a normal and integral part of human activity as is muscular movement.”¹⁴ He in making a distinction between that which is imaginative and that which is “imaginary,” describes the former as “warm and intimate taking in of the full scope of a situation” as opposed to the latter which rather fringes on the realm of fantasy and doubtful reality. For him, imagination is very much at the foreground of thinking. Thus, in our struggle to establish coherence and continuity in our experience, imagination, he writes “is a way of seeing and feeling things as they compose an integral whole. It is the large and generous blending of interests at the point where the mind comes in contact with the world.”¹⁵

4. Moral Imagination as the Opening of Possibilities

The underlying assumption in the discussions carried above has been that, given a situation, the exercise of moral imagination is essential, because it enhances the scope of our possibilities.¹⁶ And the reason why we concentrate on our possibilities is to make our lives better and more meaningful. To start with, we are born into a culture, and as we try more or less consciously to

¹² Martha Nussbaum, “Flawed crystals: James’s *The Golden Bowl* and Literature as Moral Philosophy,” *New Literary History* XV, 1983, 43.

¹³ Nussbaum, *Flawed Crystals*, 169.

¹⁴ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 277.

¹⁵ John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1980), 271.

¹⁶ Johnson defines moral imagination as “an ability to imaginatively discern various possibilities for acting within a given situation and to envision the potential help and harm that are likely to result from a given action” (Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination* (Chicago: Chicago University press, 1993), 202.

make good our lives, with varying degree of success, we find our aspirations and opportunities defined by the conventionalities of our culture. Practically speaking, since our outlook and moral groundings are already informed and shaped by the values we have learned from our culture, so the primary task of moral imagination, in part, is to explore and acquaint us better with these conventional possibilities that are available within our culture. However, the scope of the possibilities does not end here, it expands as and when we come in contact and become acquainted with the historical perspectives and understandings of other cultures. It is through these comparative engagements, with the others' worldview in the form of literature, such as novels and biographies, that we realize that the conventional possibilities available to us do not exhaust the possibilities of life.¹⁷

Understood in terms of function, moral imagination can be said to have an exploratory as well as a corrective function.¹⁸ Our rudimentary view is to start with options that are already couched in the understanding of the culture that we are born with as discussed above. Our aspirations and opportunities are largely defined by the conventional possibilities that our culture provides. Part of the exploratory function of moral imaginations is to acquaint us with what we think constitutes a good life and what these conventional possibilities provide us with. However, the scope of moral imagination enables us to go beyond these conventional possibilities provided by our culture. The circle of possibilities expands as we step outside our own and become acquainted with the other's culture. Indeed, in the process we realize that that the possibilities provided in terms of ordinary laws and conventions do not exhaust the possibilities of life but are a subset of it. This helps increase the number of possibilities and expand the breadth of our moral possibilities. This expanded breadth of possibilities also helps provide a point from where we can in stepping outside of our culture confront the pitfalls and the dangers of our own culture. At the same time the increasing breadth of moral imagination helps us appreciate our own possibilities by providing another perspective from which to judge the possibilities before us. This

¹⁷In talking of the importance of moral imagination, Iris Murdoch holds a view that an egoist has a narrower moral world view than a moral person. The reason she explains lies not with the fact that moral people are necessarily more creative as such but more because they possess a larger picture of life that allows them to see right and wrong clearly and with less doubt. (Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, New York: Penguin Press, 1993), 325.

¹⁸ John Kekes, "Moral Imagination, Freedom and Humanities," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 28 1991, 104

exploratory function of moral imagination is forward-looking in the sense that it concerns question of the available possibilities we can choose from to realize in the future.¹⁹

Apart from this exploratory function, another important question that moral imagination addresses is that it can help redirect our thinking towards our past. The rationale here, for us to look backward to the past comes with the realization that our present predicaments are but a result of the possibilities that were open before us and the choices that we have thereof made in the past. This exercise calls for an in depth study of the choices that we made. Exercising this function prompts us to assess how reasonable or unreasonable individuals were in their appraisal of the possibilities open to them. Such reflective act of engagements with the past is also known as the corrective function of moral imagination. In the process, this reflective exercise also helps us to understand the emerging patterns, constitutive of the way in which we have appraise or misappraise our possibilities, which help us in articulating ourselves better in guarding ourselves against their recurrence in situations we. It helps us to overcome the obstacles of falsification of facts that were prevalent in our earlier appraisal and reach a realistic estimate of what we can do with the possibilities presently available to make our lives better. It also makes clear to us the reason why some possibilities attracted us sufficiently to make us act on them. It also helps in understanding the existing gap between what was and is reasonable to believe about the possibilities before us and what we actually believed and can believe about them. It thus allows us to have a coherent picture of ourselves and thus make us better equipped by making ourselves aware of our own strength and limitations, given the range of possibilities before us.²⁰

Thus, contrary to the fear that imaginative exercise can land us in, moral imagination can help us gain greater control over our lives in reducing the discrepancy between what we actually believe and what is reasonable to believe, concerning the possibilities. It helps us avoid the habitual mistakes we make, mistakes that are responsible for forming wrong views about our possibilities and thus our capacities. It also introduces us to possibilities that are beyond those which our present condition provides. So, it enlarges the scope of our desires. However, it should be noted that that what we are claiming is not to be understood as implying that an adoption of moral imagination can makes us free. Rather, the claim that we are making is relatively limited,

¹⁹ Ibid., 105.

²⁰ John Kekes, "Moral Imagination, Freedom and Humanities," 105-107.

in the sense that in embracing moral imagination, one is provided with new and perhaps better possibilities that can and does increase our sense of freedom.

5. Nussbaum on Moral Imagination

For Nussbaum a moral situation is not something to which rules can apply but a situation from which moral demand arises. So, often morality that is guided by a universal rule of conduct, such as the Kantian approach, fails to capture the uniqueness of our situations and in the process misses out on important features of our moral lives. For Kant, that action which is willed autonomously without any consideration of the circumstances and personal inclinations is that which qualifies as moral worthy action. This will which then becomes the categorical imperative is to be followed in all circumstances irrespective of the consequences that follow. However, an Aristotelian reading of ethics differs from the Kantian ethics in the following way, instead of asking the question “what ought I to do?” it asks the questions “How should I live my life?” For Aristotle, the study of ethics is concerned with a search for the specification of the good for a human being in contrast to Kant whose primary focus is on actions and how those actions are willed. Therefore, Nussbaum vouches for an Aristotelian approach where we in addressing the issues of moral philosophy are engaged with concerns that see into the particularity and uniqueness of our lives. It is against the idea of resorting to a methodical approach that simply involves an extensive application of a universal solution in response to the various issue and challenges of life with all its complexities.

Thus for her it becomes very important that we confront the particular so that the uniqueness of the situation is reflected and apply to it a “morally sensitive and intuitive” perception. Moral judgment results from the “fine awareness of a situation and not from the application of antecedent rules, it is but a “seeing” of the “bewildering moral occasion.” It entails “seeing a complex, a concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling.”²¹ It requires refined sensitivity and calls for a response that is “highly context specific and nuanced and responsive to thing whose rightness could not be captured in a description that fell short of the artistic.”²²

²¹Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 152

²² *Ibid.*, 154

So in order to address questions of moral concerns she sees that literature can represent and draw attention to the concrete particularities of a life lived. Literature in being alert and sensitive to the demands of the situation can capture the “complexity, the indeterminacy, the sheer difficulty of moral choice” which the language of universal rules fails to capture.²³ Thus, she holds that the novel with its fictional creation of the “contingent complexities of a tangled human life,” makes for a persuasive argument and educates the readers’ sense of moral sensitivity.²⁴ Literature with its capacity to represent and draw attention to the concrete particularities of life can portray aspects of a well-lived life and in this sense a novel be considered as a “moral achievement.”²⁵

Moral truths possess a particular style of expression which traditional moral philosophy fails to produce.²⁶ This sort of expression is rather found in novels. For her, “Literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content – an integral part, then, of the search for and the statement of truth.”²⁷ Accordingly, not only does an engagement with literature heighten our ability to perceive morally relevant situations but in addition they equip us with the ability to structure these perceptions within a contextual situation. Literary narratives in giving space to the concrete emotions and the multilayered nuances of human experiences is said to enrich and humanize the abstract theoretical rules evoked by narrative forms and these kinds of emotional structures can give rise to finding exceptional ways of ethical solution.²⁸ In arguing for the need of literature in moral imagination she writes,

Why novels and not histories or biographies? My central subject is the ability to imagine what it is like to live the life of another person who might, given changes in circumstances, be oneself or one of one’s loved ones ... In other words, history simply records what in fact occurred, whether or not it represents a general possibility for human lives. Literature focuses on the possible, inviting its readers to wonder about themselves.²⁹

²³ Martha C. Nussbaum, “Flawed crystals”, 43.

²⁴ Ibid., 40.

²⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum, ““Finely Aware and Richly Responsible” : Literature and the Moral Imagination,” in *Literature and the Questions of Philosophy*, ed. A. Cascardi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 169.

²⁶ The most important truths about human psychology cannot be communicated or grasped by intellectual activity alone, emotions have an irreducibly important cognitive role to play.

²⁷ Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, 3.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 5.

In addressing the question, “how should a human live?” what we intent is to give an ethical account that will capture the practicalities of our life that involves engagements with those pressing ethical questions. Consequently, the aim is to bring to a common platform the empirical as well as practical aspect of life: empirical in the sense that it involves drawing from life experiences and practical in the sense that it aims to arrived at a conception by which human beings can live, and live together.³⁰

This exercise includes trying out possibilities starting from the popular alternatives available before us and measuring them up against one another, with reference to the framework of what constitute a sense of meaningful living for the individuals concerned. In the process, nothing is to be considered as an established truth or unrevisable and nothing else is ruled out. The intent is not to arrive at a decision that involves extra-human reality but an answer that is in response to the call for “coherence and fit in the web of judgment, feeling, perception and principle, taken as a whole.”³¹ In such situations, a good fiction is found to be effective as it is equipped with “the particularity, the emotive appeal, the absorbing plottedness, the variety and indeterminacy,” that brings home the total picture of the reality. In addition, with the help of such illustrations the reader can discern more easily what is necessary and relevant. Moreover, since novels are open-ended and characterize life more richly, they are said to help the reader to have a better understanding of why things matter more this way rather than the other way in the search for an appropriate description. It like an “optical instrument” enables the reader to become a reader of his own life and help to create an ethical structure more appropriate for life.

Again, she is in agreement with Aristotle’s observation that our experiences are too limited, confined and parochial since we have never lived enough hold that in such situations literature can help us experience those things which would otherwise have been too distant for us. This holds true as “all living is interpreting: all action requires seeing the world *as something*” and literature helps us to see with greater precisions and focus.³² It helps us to be more aware of the things that we experience and encounter in our daily life, experiences which we are often passive of or indifferent to. Understood in this sense, literature in introducing alternative possibilities can be said not to simply extend the horizons of our life. It in opening us

³⁰ Ibid., 25.

³¹ Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, 26.

³² Ibid., 47

up to newer possibilities which could have been otherwise been unreachable or unthinkable for us give us a more sharper and more precise understanding of things that happens in life. So, it vertically deepens our experience. She in agreement with Proust holds that “it is only in relation to the literary text, and never in life, that we can have a relation characterized by genuine altruism, and by genuine acknowledgement of the otherness of the other.”³³

Furthermore, the enterprise of reading brings together and creates a sort of readers’ community, where each individual’s imagination, thoughts and feelings are respected as morally valuable.³⁴ Here, the ubiquity of “we” is intended in such a manner that it does not undermine the separateness and qualitative differences of each individual but at the same time the privacy or individuality of each is encouraged. In talking of the need of concern for the other, Nussbaum with reference to Marcus Aurelis observes that it is not enough that we amass knowledge in order to be a world citizen rather more important is it that we cultivate a taste for sympathetic imagination. Literature has the capacity to help us develop this aspect of imagination as it helps us see “not something that has happened, but the kind of thing that might happen.”³⁵

Narrative imagination as such prepare us for moral imagination in the sense that the curiosity that we develop through reading helps identify the other as somebody with qualitative differences, with deep and hidden places worthy of respect. It helps us to understand the circumstances surrounding the situation that are responsible for creating such needs and accordingly help us to cultivate a sympathetic responsiveness to other’s needs. This is possible because literature helps us to view life as full of rich inner life, with hidden contents that needs to be uncovered.³⁶ In these context children, for instance, as they grow up learn that there are complex human behaviours such as courage, self-restraint, dignity, perseverance and fairness etc apart from the ubiquitous feelings of hope and fear, happiness and distress. Were it not for a narrative setting with its concrete particulars, they could not have comprehended the full intensity of such complex traits in all its abstraction. Such comprehension in turn help them to develop a compassionate understanding of the other as they gradually realize that they could have easily been the one in such position as their counterparts. This also explains for how they

³³ Ibid., 48.

³⁴ Lionel Trilling, *The liberal imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*, New York 1950.

³⁵ Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 86.

³⁶ Ibid., 90

learn to treat the other with respect as they would wish the other to treat themselves had they been in those circumstances. Such awareness of the others' predicament enables us to step into the other's shoe and help us to accommodate as well as reciprocate to a given situation more positively.

Bringing to focus the ability of literature to inculcate a sense of sympathetic imagination that help us to explore both sameness as well as difference. Nussbaum writes that in the ancient Athenian culture, "Going to a tragedy was not understood to be an "aesthetic experience" if that means an experience detached from civic and political concerns."³⁷ It was in relation to moral education of the youths that the ancients ascribe enormous importance to tragedy. It in exposing the young citizens to what may happen to them, long before life does, help them prepare for any eventualities. It helped them become acquaint not only with whom they might become but also familiarized them with the other's pain and pleasure, their associates such as the slaves and the Such kind of experiences teaches us to respect the voice and rights of the other who has agency as well as complexity. It help us to see the other not merely as an object or a compliant receiver of merits and benefits. And as we become more aware of the reason why someone has in a certain situation acted in a particular way, we in imagining ourselves in his place are less likely to judge the person harshly and thus less likely to be strict even in meting out justice.³⁸

However, one of the most important roles that moral imaginations can play is that it in taking us out of our comfort zone challenges us. Most of us have structured our life in such a way that over the years we have built a kind of blind spots and fear that militate against our acknowledgement of the other. Such outlook has often little to offer and normally leads to complacency. However, we in critically reading a situation learn not only to empathize but are forced to raise critical question about those things with which we can easily sympathize. It in disturbing us poses a challenge to traditional wisdom and values. This is done basically to develop what might be known as "respect before a soul." It involves a process through which one can assess what we have become or how far we have reached in the process of engaging with our work. Thus she writes that, "If literature is a representative of human possibilities, the works

³⁷ Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 93.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

of literature we choose will inevitably respond to, and further develop, our sense of who, we are and might be.”³⁹

6. Taylor on Moral Imagination

Taylor is of the view that some characteristic features of our self regarding moral principles are universally grounded. He is of the view that certain moral intuitions of the self and its world are endemic to all humans. For example, he points out that the regard that we have for human life is one of the deepest and most highly esteemed moral principle that we have, which cut across different cultures and societies and is not merely a characteristic of self survival.⁴⁰ All sections of the society across the world condemn the act of murder. This shows that individuals do not merely act but are constantly evaluating the reasons and motives behind their actions in appealing to certain objective norms. Taylor contends that human beings are strong evaluators and this capacity for evaluation is distinctively an essential characteristics of moral life.⁴¹ The range of desires that humans experience are varied and cannot be classified as same, they can be arranged in terms of hierarchy and said to be higher or more admirable than others.⁴² The process involved in ranking them is said to be often tacit, unconscious or intuitive. Thus, he stands for a kind of moral realism where goods that are strongly valued calls for attention and demand the respect of individuals because of the intrinsic values they possessed.

Taylor in moving away from the standpoint of moral subjectivism argues that the choices made thereof can be objectively assessed and be rationally discussed and debated. The good according to him is that which in enabling an individual to decide the choices before him or her help transcend the animal level of desires such as the craving for food, sex and survival.⁴³ It is concerned with questions that are aimed at knowing, what kind of a life is worth living? Or what would a rich and meaningful life constitute in as against a debased one? Here, the desire that we are talking of is said to be linked with a second order desire or one that involves qualitative discrimination rather than concerns with power or force. Taylor asserts that though the good is

³⁹ Ibid., 206.

⁴⁰ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University press, 1989), 8.

⁴¹ Ibid., 3,4.

⁴² Ibid., 20.

⁴³ Ibid., 42.

something owned personally by the self yet it is grounded in some greater reality than the self. It is not reducible to one's style nor is it wholly the product of culture.

Again for Taylor, another important element of the self is the need to articulate the self within a particular moral framework. This throws open the concept of horizon and the image of ideas goods and desires framed within a reasoned structure. According to him understanding the world of morality is not limited to understanding those ideas that form and inform our sense of respect for and obligations to others but also involves concerns that are constitutive of living life to its maximum.⁴⁴ And so with regard to the question that deals with the meaning of life there is some standard framework or a space within which the standards by which we judge and measure our lives, whether we are living life to its fullest or not, is articulated. This horizon of significance involves a moral mapping of an area within which the self exists. It involves structuring one's moral experiences and judgments and placing them against a set of moral parameters. This framework in marking out the space or horizon that helps us in measuring the meaning of life is reflective of our quest for life.

Though this horizon is not clearly defined it forms an essential dimension of the self. It is essential in making sense of our life and provide us with a background for our moral judgment as we in articulating our horizon explicate our sense of moral response. There is a dialectical relationship that the self shares with such a framework that it renders the self disoriented with the loss of such horizon.⁴⁵ Again, within the sphere of one's moral horizon there is also a process of a classification of goods involved, structured on the basis of qualitative discriminations. This contains within it a life-shaping worldview that provides structure as well as guidance concerning how to relate to others and is essential in defining the self. This frame work finds a personal resonance with the self and locates the self with a moral worldview.⁴⁶ It is endemic to one's self-interpretation.⁴⁷

The framework as we have already pointed out is dialectical and dynamic and is reflective of our spiritual quest. It is dynamic in the sense that it inspires the self and empowers it

⁴⁴ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 14.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 18,19.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

to perform accordingly and over time develop a personal resonance in response to one's experiences. Accordingly, owing to this dynamic nature, there are different moral horizons, different maps, for different selves. It is thus important to articulate well and note the differences keeping in mind the need for better understanding and communication. This call for demarcating the background picture so as to locate the good, vis-à-vis the self, helps to deepen one's understanding of moral goods and heightens one's awareness of the complexities of moral life. It in encouraging a rational discussion provides a check to the Self-enforced inarticulacy.⁴⁸ Taylor holds that there are no fixed criteria by which to judge between different frameworks, except to reveal what they actually claim.

This process of identifying the framework is disjunctive and problematic as there is no agreed upon standard framework that is shared by all. There is thus, a traditional way, a pluralist way or a theistic or secular way of framing it and these are reflective of the "relatively open disjunction of attitudes." Even within this framework there is a qualitative distinction that some action, some means of living or feeling is incomparably higher than others which are commonly found or achievable. Often these different goods compete with one another for one's attention. In the process, one good, the hypergood, tends to surpass the other in value and in the process the rest of the other goods are arrayed in order of priority with relation to this good. However, maintaining the distinction between a higher life and the lower slothful life at the end is "to be found not outside of but as a *manner of living* ordinary life."⁴⁹

Nevertheless, the competitions among these goods are seen in a positive light and it is important that in the process the good should not subdue or eliminate the rest. This qualitative distinction points to the fact that in life there are certain dignity and worth that requires a contrast. These ends or goods are not simply more desirable because we desire them but they are so owing to nature of their specialty and refinement and according to which they are said to command our awe and respect and thus serve as the standard for us. Examples of the hypergood are qualities such as happiness, universal justice, etc. This good has the power to exert a major influence on how one's individual moral horizon gets articulated and is oriented. However, such distinction becomes possible only when the self has acquired a requisite depth which in turn

⁴⁸ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 53-90.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

serves as a guiding point against which an individual measures his or her progress as well as direction in life.⁵⁰

Consequently, along with the ethics of fame, of rational mastery, of transformation of the will, there is another criterion that has come to existence in the last two centuries which is distinctively based on vision and expressive power. Here, the scope of the horizon is dependent on the power of expression and is rooted in the quintessential modern belief that the artist can see farther than the rest of us.⁵¹ Spelling out what we presuppose a certain form of life as worthwhile *inter alia* amounts to articulating a framework. And, in this modern act of finding a sense of life, discovering a meaningful expression is informed by the act of inventing. So, for Taylor, living within such strongly qualified horizons is what constitutes a human agency. One can provide a convincing answer to the question who am I? only when one is sure of where he or she stands. And these standings are defined and understood in terms of commitment to what is good, valuable, duties and actions that we endorse or oppose, all of which falls again within the framework of the horizon.⁵² Lack of a framework leads to an acute form of disorientation which is then explained in terms of a lack of frame or horizon. Thus, Knowing who you are is possible only when one is oriented in a moral space where questions of what is good or bad matters.

The identity of the self is fundamentally defined by the extent to which things holds significance for us, understood in the frame of a certain space of questions that strives to define our orientation to the good. However that which is good is articulated and partly constituted in moral and evaluative language and a language only exist within a language community. Thus, Taylor points to the fact that, “One is a self only among other self. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it.”⁵³ So, the concept of moral mapping is not sufficient in articulating one’s moral frameworks, it extends to the community. This extension becomes essential as the notion of a moral self is incomplete when the dialogical aspect of self-constitution is not taken into account. The question who? Places the person in the position of a potential interlocutor in a society of interlocutors. So, he holds that, the good is not something

⁵⁰ Ibid., 63.

⁵¹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 22.

⁵² Ibid., 27.

⁵³ Ibid., 35.

that is free-floating but something that it rooted in a community and something that result from a narrative.

There is a sense in which one cannot be a self on one's own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who are essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to continuing grasp of language of self-understanding ... a self exists only within ... 'webs of interlocution.'"⁵⁴

This web of interlocution is important in the sense that the conversation with the other is inevitable to one's moral self-constitution and its development. However, at the same time, communality does not entail that there should be uniformity or a dull conformity to conventionalism. Rather, the reflective economy of being-with-others requires that the other must be granted his or her intrinsic integrity, presence and vision as well. The self can be understood only when it is understood in recognition in terms of the self's interdependence with other selves.⁵⁵

However, questions can be raised about those situations where the question of an individual's identity in finding his or her own stand declares independence from the webs of interlocution that an individual find himself or herself placed originally. Such kind of situation often occur when the individual in search for a higher life find himself being called to detached from the original situation of identity-formation. In such situations granted that an individual in being original can transcend the circle of his historic framework in either confronting it or relating it to the language of the others. Indeed, one can in negating our embeddedness in a web of locution declares independence and define ourselves as having no connection to a web or framework as such at all. But this doesn't mean that we have severed our dependence on the webs of interlocution. It is simply amounts to a change in the webs, as in the nature of dependence for if one examines carefully it can be found to be "enframed in a social understanding of great temporal depth."⁵⁶ A stepping altogether outside the framework of interlocution is rather a continuing conversation of an independent stance that in itself is defined by the tradition of the culture to which one originally belongs.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 37.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 39.

Another important dimension of morality lies with the constitutive good. The term “Constitutive” stands for that kind of good, which is essential to the particular nature or character of a thing. It is said to have a sustaining, and nurturing power in providing conditions that are conducive for the actualization of those powerful qualifications in life.⁵⁷ The constitutive good Taylor points out is the moral source that empowers the moral agent and strengthens the moral horizon. It gives to the life goods their quality of goodness.⁵⁸ It is what set apart an individual making her or him worthy of non-discriminating care and the love of it can be said to empower us to be good.⁵⁹ Moreover, the constitutive good is found to be embedded in a particular culture and function and varies from one era to another.

7. Ricoeur on Moral Imagination

In the concluding portion of the last chapter we have talked about how the functioning of narrative imagination calls for its completion in moral imagination. According to Ricoeur, this transition from a world of imagination to a world of ethics is a natural progression as the aim of narrative itself is to live an examined life. This comes out clearly when we understand how the narrative component of life calls for ethical determination or moral imputation to complete its act. The rootedness of narrative in ethical determinations, for instance, is clearly brought out in the writings of Walter Benjamin from whom the art of storytelling is different from scientific observations in the sense that in narrative the process of exchanges of experiences involves an exchange of practical wisdom.⁶⁰ These exchanges include estimations and evaluation of actions that are subjected to questions of approval or disapproval and the agents to praise or blame.

Following which, Ricoeur argues that even the thought experiments that we carry out in imagination are subjected to questions of good or bad including those cases of devaluation which falls under the rubric of judgment.⁶¹ Every case of action calls into play the question of responsibility that involve both a sense of “counting on” as well as “being accountable for.” Thus, even historiographic narrative, which is considered as the most neutral form of narrative, can never be said to reach the degree of zero valuation. And in particular cases, where a historian

⁵⁷ Ibid., 264.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 93.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 83-109.

⁶¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 164

who is guided by curiosity rather than a personal preference for values is confronted with those horrible circumstances of the history of the victim, the relation of debt is transformed into the duty never to forget.⁶² In such cases, a reply to the tormenting question “who am I?” is met by the response “who am I, so inconstant, that notwithstanding you count on me?”

Primarily, narrative in being placed at the crossroads between theory of action and moral theory can be said to serve as a natural transition point between description and prescription. Narrative in anticipating actions that are complex and rich in the nature of ethical telling is able to function as the guide for an extension of the practical field beyond the simple actions. This is made possible as narrative provides an imaginary space for thought experiments, wherein moral judgments is said to operate in a hypothetical mode.⁶³ So an inquiry into the teleological end of narrative as laid down by Ricoeur takes recourse to an ethical end that involves “*aiming at the “good life” with and for others, in just institution.*”⁶⁴ An understanding of the three components that constitute the “ethical intention” of a narrative will help us to understand why an narrative engagement with the meaning of life is incomplete without the consideration of the end.

Talking of the first component of this ethical end that is concerned with “good life” or “true Life” as Proust would put it, the good according to Aristotle is that at which everything aims at, the standard of living well. The term “life” denotes the biologic rootedness of life and the unity of the person as a whole. It as opposed to fragmented practices is designative of the person as a whole and is reflective of the appreciative, evaluative dimension of ergon(life plan) that is used to qualify life in all its intrinsic goodness and its basic pleasure.⁶⁵ Thus, the narrative unity of life points to the fact that the “who?” of ethics is none other than the one to whom the question of imputation is applicable and of whom we speak as a suffering as well as acting being and the one to whom narrative assigns a narrative identity.

The second component of the aim, “with and for others” evokes a sense of “solicitude,” the dialogical dimension of self-esteem as neither one of them can be experienced or reflected upon in the absence of the other. Thus, Ricoeur writes that, “To say self is not to say myself.”⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 170.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 172.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 178.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 180.

Here, the movement from selfhood to mineness is to be understood in a qualified sense where the passage marked by the clause “in each case.” It involves a sense of the ethics of reciprocity that is characterized by an acknowledgement of the mediating role of others between the capacities of the self and its realization. In our discourse of “I can” the emphasis is on the verb or on being-able-to-do and in the mediating role of others where they can be said to intercede between our capacities and its realization. The concept of otherness brings out the question of “lack” and this lack introduces to us the need for mutual relationship or friendship that puts a check against the idea of any egoistical leanings. This reciprocity as an act that involves exchange between humans who each esteem themselves can be shown has to be extended all the way to the commonality of “living together.”⁶⁷ A friend is thus said to play the role of providing what one is incapable of procuring by oneself. Thus, for Ricoeur, solicitude or what we know as “benevolent spontaneity” is more fundamental than obedience to duty and is said to be inextricably tied to self-esteem understood within the frame of a narrative that aims at a “good life.”⁶⁸

The aim of living well also encompasses, the third constituent, a sense of living in “just institutions,” coupled with a sense of belonging to a historical community.⁶⁹ This is because living well is not restricted to interpersonal association but extends to institutions. The fundamental characteristic of this idea of institution is defined by the nature of bonding that is based on the concept of common more rather than that of constraining rules. This idea of plurality suggests the extension of interhuman relations beyond the face-to-face encounter between the “I” and “you” to a new determination of the self in terms of “each.” It in including the anonymous third parties hints at the possibility of “action in concert.”⁷⁰ Here, the idea of a public space characterized by plurality is so extensive and covered by relations of domination that it is brought to light only when it is about to be destroyed and leaves open room for violence and so it is sometimes given the status of “forgotten.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 180-183. This idea of solicitude is best captured by Levinas for whom there is “no self without another who summons it to responsibility.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 190.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 194.

⁷⁰ Hanna Arendt talks of this action in terms of a public action that involves a web of human relations within which each human life unfolds its brief history.

⁷¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 197.

In Ricoeur's scheme of narrative identity, the self in answer to the question "who is the author?" tells a story that is reflective of the continuing process of self-constancy and self-rectification following the intervention of poetic imagination. This idea of mutability and transformation explains for how this sense of self (ipse) "rest on a temporal structure that conforms to the model of dynamic identity arising from the poetic composition of text."⁷² It is different from the substantialist identity of sameness by which a person can be identified and reidentified, it involves a perpetual process of reinterpretation in conjunction with the stories that we recount to ourselves as well as others. Self-constancy involves a process of conduct so that the others can count on me or in other words to hold myself accountable for my actions. Thus, both the meaning of the term "counting on" and "being accountable for" is covered by the idea of responsibility in self-constancy. Thus, the self already has within it an ethical import as the kind of self-knowledge that we aim for is one that is purged by the "cathartic effects of narrative be they historical or fictional, conveyed by our culture."⁷³

This identity is not limited to the stories of individuals or collective histories of people but is basically a narrative of humans in the world. This is evident from the fact that even before we configure our life, our actions are already symbolically structured and temporally schematized, which later on is again refigured by "poetic resolution" in narrative. However, as it has been pointed out again and again that if this poetic resolution is instrumental in bringing a structure of self-constancy, it can also destabilize narrative identity as imagination in itself knows no censure. Thus, the solution to this question of fundamental fluidity that threatens the notion of self-constancy lies in resorting to ethical responsibility which Ricoeur refer to as "the highest factor in self-constancy."⁷⁴ With this understanding, Ricoeur places it in the hands of the reader, the initiator of action the responsibility to choose from among the multiple propositions brought in by ethical considerations. He points out that, "It is at this point that the notion of narrative identity encounters its limit and has to link up with the non-narrative components in the

⁷² Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 246.

⁷³ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*. Vol 3., 247.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 249.

formation of an acting subject.”⁷⁵ Thus, people in a world of their own fantasy can do what every they like but when it comes to the real world they cannot act without impunity in life.

The fragility of narrative and the possibility of manipulation therefore in pursuit of an answer take us to the final question, who is capable of Imputation? This concept of recognizing responsibility can be articulated only in a culture that has elaborate moral and judicial doctrines as the predicated assigned to these actions are ethico-moral predicates connected with that of good or obligation.⁷⁶ The very idea of it suggests the need for accountability, to be able to bear the consequences of one’s action, particularly those actions in which the other has been implicated as a victim. The implication is that narrative imagination needs to be substantiated by narrative will if one is to engage with an ethical notion that involves terms such as commitments and promises to oneself and others. However, Ricoeur makes it clear that this ethical deliberation is not to be mistaken as exiting or distancing from the question of identity rather it has to be understood as “liberation from One’s private interest.”

Ricoeur in maintaining a balance between the ‘exaltation’ of the substantial ‘I’ and the ‘humiliation’ of the self proposes a ‘hermeneutics of the self that aims at answering the question who? The corresponding *multiplicity* of answers to the question who speaks, who acts, who narrates and who is subject to moral imputation explains for the contingency of self-identity. This account of narrative identity, of the ‘who’ apart from addressing the self’s temporal dimension is also reflective of the moral dimension of the self as it ends in addressing the ‘who?’ of moral imputation—namely, self-constancy. Therefore, acts such as friendship, or promise keeping display a sense of self constancy rather than simply the sameness of character. In the process of exploration of such contingencies, literary fictions “remain imaginative variations on an invariant, our corporeal condition experienced as the existential mediation between the self and the world.”⁷⁷

Imputability, the last in the question of Who’s is described by Ricoeur following A. Lalande as “ the relation of the act to the agent, abstracting, on the other hand, from moral value

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans., David Pellauer, (London: Havard University Press, 2005), 105.

⁷⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 150.

and, on the other, from rewards, punishments, profits or damages that may ensue.”⁷⁸ The concept of imputation can be articulated only in a culture that had almost exhausted the causal explanation as far as possible and ushered in a well worked out moral and juridical doctrines. It is that act which in placing something “on account,” makes the agent impute them to themselves. The predicates assigned to those actions that falls under the rubric of it have a lot to do with either the idea of good or that of obligation. It involves not merely placing an action under someone’s responsibility but classifying the action as permissible or impermissible, good, just, conforming to duty, done out of duty and the wisest in case of conflictual situations.

The meaning of a capable subject reaches its highest designation under the concept of imputability such that it involves a sense of self-designation. It accordingly holds the person responsible as culpable or not, particularly for those faults in which another is reputed to have been the victim. The notion of responsibility turned toward the past implies that we assume a past act that affects us as our doing without it being entirely our own work. It ushers in the sense of indebtedness for that action which has made us what we are today. From a future perspective, it implies that someone assumes responsibility for those consequences that are not expressly foreseen and intended. Thus Ricoeur holds that, “Imputability thus finds its other in the real or potential victims of a violent act.”⁷⁹

As a result, on a juridical point we held the agent responsible for the known or foreseeable effects of the action whereas on the moral plane we held the agent responsible for the others who is under our charge. This shift in the focus from the action to the vulnerable others tends to make what is fragile the ultimate object of responsibility. The extension does not end with the vulnerable other but extends to the future vulnerability of humans and their environment. And the challenge that we are left with as a result of this extension is to find a balance between fleeing from responsibility and its consequences and the inflation into infinite responsibility leading to indifference. And a step towards finding a just measure lies in drawing a line between narrative imagination and moral imagination.

⁷⁸ A. Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, 484 as quoted in Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 292.

⁷⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 108.

This is clearly brought out by Ricoeur in discussing the dangers of failing to maintain the difference between fiction and history. He brings up the instance where someone like Faurisson, in France ended up declaring that “In Auschwitz, however, nothing real has happened; there is only what is said about it.”⁸⁰ This is where the role of moral imagination becomes crucial in stepping in and reminding us of the debt we owe to the dead and thus the duty of restitution we have towards them. He holds that we must “render” what has happened which in a way results in a communion established between the living and the dead. This is because, “The past is not just what is absent from history; the right of its ‘having been’ also demands to be recognized.”⁸¹

8. Narrative and Moral Imagination

Ricoeur finds a common ground between what he calls “narrative understanding” and “the practical wisdom of moral judgment” because both in reply to the question how should one live finds an examined life as that which would lead to a good life. For him while the enterprise of ethics, following the ancient thinkers, aims at building a connection between virtue and the pursuit of happiness, he sees narrative with its creative imagination as providing explicit means of imagining how an exploration of different moral values is connected with the quest for happiness. Narrative with its imaginary variations furnish us with multiple possibilities of human conduct and their related virtues or vices. In this sense, narratives can be said to visualize, persuade as well as initiate actions in a particular manner aimed at the good. Moreover, narrative with its sympathetic imagination allows for a kind of translatability where it is possible for us to relate to the other as oneself and to oneself as another. It brings about an awareness of the circumstances wherein we are placed at a point where “to say self is not to say I.” Identity is incomplete without the notion of solicitude for the other and extends further to the idea of living together in a just institution. Thus, the narrative self is one, who in remaining self-constant over time and in realizing himself or herself as the subject of imputation to the question “who?” makes the proud declaration “here is where I stand.”

⁸⁰ As quoted in “Discussion: Ricoeur on Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 186.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

For Nussbaum too, the relationship between the poetics of narrative and the ethics of judgment is such that certain literary text are indispensable to the philosophical inquiry of what constitutes a good life. The specialty of narrative imagination is such that literary narratives in giving priority to the particularity of a person's perception can complement and humanized the abstract moral laws. The focus of giving primary consideration to context specific experiences rather than allowing for a blanket application of moral laws to a particular situation help us to "find an account of an inclusive starting point, and an open and dialectical method, that is, in effect, the philosophical description of this real-life activity."⁸² However, this does not mean that we are resorting to a kind of subjectivist and irrational procedures. Rather the intent is to involve ourselves in an ethical enterprise that will reflect how we actually address those situations when faced with the most pressing ethical questions. Thus, the inquiry involving moral imagination as such is described by her as a "perceptive Equilibrium" that is both empirical as well as practical: empirical in the sense that it draws evidences from the experiences of life and practical in the sense that it seeks to find a solution by which humans can live together.⁸³

Finally, in case of Taylor, an answer to the fundamental question, Who? Can be given only when one knows where he stands. The notion of self which is connected to the need for identity cannot do without some orientation to the good as our identity is defined by the way things have significance for me. This implies that to make sense of who we are there has to be in place a structure that incorporates a crucial set of qualitative distinctions between goods that is reflective of the meaning of life. So what makes humans worthy of respect is our capacity to feel the pain of human suffering or what is repugnant about injustice and knowing where we stand in relation to these issues or what is our orientation towards them. We are selves only to the extent that we are located in a certain space of questions and this issue of identity is worked out only with the help of a language of interpretation. And since this meaning is said to hold within a language community, a self can never be understood outside the web of this locution, he or she is understood only in relation to those conversation partners.

⁸² Nussbaum, *Love's knowledge*, 25

⁸³ Ibid

Accordingly, this is where Taylor agreed with Wittgenstein in holding that agreement in meanings involves agreement in judgments.⁸⁴ Orientation in moral space means an orientation to the good of the incomparably higher level that orients even the direction of our lives. So the more pressing question according to Taylor is not just about “where we *are* , but where we’re *going*.”⁸⁵ This is when a narrative understanding of the present in terms of “and then” becomes critical. The expanse and the reach of the role of narrative stretches for just as we make sense of what we have become through the story of our life, similarly, our projection towards the future is shaped by our response to the “and then.” It is determined by whether we decide to abide by the direction in which we seem to be heading or change the course by giving it a new bent. And this sense of having a new direction is what Taylor, following MacIntyre, calls the “quest” of life.

⁸⁴ Taylor, *Sources of the self*, 35.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 47.

CHAPTER 5

REVISITING NARRATIVE SELF IDENTITY

1. An Overview

Life is what happens in the interval between birth and death and in this sense narrative can provide us with a powerful medium to capture that interval. It, in lying at the intersection between history and fiction, allows us to construct what we now know as a narrative self-identity. And yet this act of assimilating life to a story cannot be understood simply in terms of a direct, one to one correspondence, the relationship cannot be taken for granted but needs to be submitted to critical scrutiny. There is always the need to apply to this existing relationship, between narrative and life, the Socratic maxim that an unexamined life is not worth living. This is primarily because in configuring a plot out of life one is constantly engaged in the process of trying to bring a synthesis out of disparate and heterogeneous elements. While it is true that the process of narration does not end with the process of configuration but is completed only in the reader, the living receiver of the narrated story, the challenge that this act of reconfiguration brings along with it, is huge.¹

Life is dynamic, the progression of our life is mostly incoherent, with the normal flow of our everyday lives interrupted by sudden twists and turns of events around us or with dull and static moments. It is not simply to be seen as a biological phenomenon but is governed by the dynamic tradition of sedimentation and innovation and so is one that is symbolically mediated. Therefore, to articulate such a vibrant phenomenon called life the integrating process of plot or emplotment cannot be a static structure. As narrative invariably involves an inter-play of fact and fiction, one can in the process of revising it, in order to bring a certain kind of desired stability into the act of narration, confabulate things to such an extent that it would, rather than reflecting life, distort it. Thus, keeping in mind the need for narrative articulation to remain true to its cause, i.e., to reflect life, we have in the course of our study brought to the act of narration, two key concepts which we felt is necessary for a veridical narrative engagement and consolidate

¹ Ricoeur observes that, “by placing narrative theory at the crossroads of the theory of action and moral theory, we have made narration serve as a natural transition between description and prescription.” (*Oneself as Another*, 171) This is because actions that are organized into a narrative have features that can be developed only within the framework of ethics as it calls for dialectic between selfhood and others.

the narrative stand. Therefore, the intent of this chapter is to examine in greater detail the concept of narrative identity that result with the introduction of the notion of authenticity and moral imagination.

In order to carry out a critical appraisal of how narrative self-identity fares with the introduction of these two concepts, I would like to begin by revisiting the arguments put forward by Galen Strawson against narrativity and in the process of responding to his charges, show how a narrative construction of our life is essential in helping us understand ourselves better and deeper. He starts his argument by deconstructing both the claims of Psychological Narrativity thesis as well as ethical Narrativity thesis as baseless. Strawson in identifying i.e., diachronicity, form-finding tendency, story-telling tendency and revisionist tendency as the four essential characteristics that goes on to define what narratives are constitutive of, argues that even the limiting case of narrativity involves nothing more than form-finding story-telling. Therefore, for him he takes himself to be [-D -F -S -R] rather than [+D +F +S +R] because, he in the first place, finds the aspiration to articulate oneself in terms of narrative as highly unnatural and ruinous as it does more harm than good.² This is based on the observation that, “the more you recall, retell, narrate yourself, the further you risk moving away from accurate self-understanding, from the truth of your being.”³ But we will in re-visiting the notion of narrative argue that narrative understanding provides a space for examined life that can be crucial in helping us to develop and deepen the meaning of our life. So, one can say that our understanding of ourselves and our lives is better configured given that our life exhibits the form [+D +F +S +R].

Therefore, the intent of this chapter is to begin with an examination of Stawson’s argument against narrativity. This will be followed by a detail examination and exposition of how the four defining characteristics of narrative i.e., Diachronic, form-finding, Story-telling and revisionism and the function they play in the construction of narrative are vital for narrative

² Galen Strawson, “Against Narrativity” *Ratio*, Vol. 17, Issue 4 (December, 2004): 428-452, 447. Here, Stawson in arguing against the belief that the aspiration to Narrative self-articulation as natural to humans and is thus essential to a well-lived life shows that we in constantly telling our life story risk the threat of drifting further away from the truth. Thus, in order to prove his point, he in identifying the four forms, i.e., Diachronic, form-finding, story-telling and revision as the defining characteristics of narrative (which are then symbolical represented by their initials and their) argues as to their being essential or inessential to the process of narrative which is again represented in the form of “+” for a response in positive and “-“ for a negative response.

³ Ibid.

articulation. And in the process of putting up arguments for how these factors are inevitable to building a narrative, we will examine how the role of authenticity and moral imagination plays a crucial role in bolstering the narrative claim of providing an alternative to the polarization between cogito and anti-cogito.

2. Strawson's Argument Against Narrative Self Identity

A very good example of the psychological narrativity thesis can be given in terms of the statement made by Antoine Roquentin, the protagonist of Sartre's novel *La Nausée* who is of the view that "a man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him *in terms of* these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it."⁴

Another example of self-identity that reflects the ethical narrativity thesis can be in the form of the definition that is put forth by Charles Taylor when he writes that a "basic condition of making sense of ourselves, that we grasp our lives in a *narrative*" as "making sense of one's life as a story is also, like orientation to the good, not an optional extra; that our lives exist also in this space of questions, which only a coherent narrative can answer."⁵ To which Ricoeur would add, "How, indeed, could a subject of action give an ethical character to his or her own life taken as a whole, if this life were not gathered together in some way, and how could this occur if not, precisely, in the form of a narrative?"⁶

In his article "Against Narrativity" Strawson raises his arguments against two popular claims. The first is against the psychological Narrative thesis that is based on an empirical and descriptive thesis that humans normally see or experience their lives as a narrative of some sort. The second is against the ethical Narrative thesis which holds that experiencing one's life as a narrative as such is essential to a well-lived life and is good to a full personhood. And thus this is the way human ought to see themselves. Accordingly, he holds that based on which thesis you subscribe to, there are four possible combinations that concern the way we hold to these two theses. One may hold the descriptive thesis to be true while denying the normative thesis or in

⁴ John Paul Sartre, 1938 *La Nausee* (Paris: Gallimard). Here, this statement is made by Roquentin, the protagonist of the novel who is also the narrator and who in writing down his observations concerning his daily life is confronted by the thought how pointless his life is.

⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 47.

⁶ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 158.

the second case a reversed view of the earlier position may be upheld, or else one may either subscribe to both or deny both. As for Strawson's stand, he holds both the thesis to be false as he believes that there is not only one good way for humans to experience that which is good; there are deeply non-narrative people, who despite not adhering to any of the two theories, live a good life. So, he says, this way of looking at things from a narrative perspective more as a hindrance to human self-understanding that impoverishes our grasp of ethical possibilities and is "potentially destructive in psychotherapeutic contexts."⁷

In order to drive home his point and make it clear, he begins by making a distinction between one's experience of oneself principally understood as "a human being taken as a whole," in the first place and as "an inner mental entity or 'self' of some sort," in case of the other. This second kind of self, which he refer to as "one's Self experience," is the kind of self-experience of which he is familiar with and falls under the category of Episodic selves [E] and is distinguishable from Diachronic [D] self-experience.⁸ Diachronics are people, who see themselves as selves, who think that they were there in the (further) past as well as will be there in the (further) future. Episodics, on the other hand, are people who despite being perfectly aware that one has a long-term continuity, have little or no sense of their selves as being there in the (further) past as well as the (further) future. Most of us, who are Diachronic are more likely to have a narrative way of looking into life whereas Episodics are more likely to have no particular tendency to see themselves as engaged with a narrative way of life at any point of their life.

However, based on these opposite natures of temporal distinctions they exhibit, one cannot say that the divisions are absolute or exclusive of one another. It does not follow that Episodics do not have their share of good memories of the past or have no anticipation for the future events. Equally, it would be wrong to assume or say that Diachronics do not suffer from an episodic lack of linkage with well remembered parts of the past. To start with, Diachronics may feel that there is something chillingly empty or less human about Episodic life but this fear is unfounded for as far as the present is concerned, Episodics can be said to be more located. Rather for the Episodics, it is very much possible that "the past can be present or alive in the present without being present or alive *as* the past."⁹ Moreover, one can have a past, a respectable

⁷ Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 429.

⁸ Ibid., 430.

⁹ Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 432.

amount of factual as well as remembered knowledge of the past “from the inside” without having the need for experiencing life as a narrative with a form. This is because according to Strawson, viewed from the point of a “human being,” certainly the past or future of the self does matter but for the self understood as “an inner mental presence” the question of further past or future is of no significance.¹⁰ But this does not mean that the self does not have any autobiographical memories of the past experiences. In fact the self does have a respectable amount of remembrances, “from the inside” about the past experiences, yet simply as discussed above it belongs to the self understood as “the human being” and not me, “an inner mental presence.”

It is simply a matter of fact, of experience that one is well aware that the past is one’s own so far as one is a human being. Undeniably, there is a sense in which the past has special emotional and moral relevance to the inner mental self but there is no sense in which the same feeling is shared when it comes to the question of whether this self was there in the past. Even in case of the future there is no significant sense that it will be there in the future. Thus, when it comes to the question of the relation of human life to narrative Strawson wonders, why is it at all important to resort to a narrative view of life? For him, perhaps those who think of this question as important are those motivated by a sense of their own importance. Many have this outlook for reasons of religious commitments which at the end is “really all about the self.”¹¹ It is rather a case of misplaced confidence when people considering their own experience, take those existentially fundamental experiences of their own as fundamentally applicable to everyone else. However, for Strawson, the best lived lives never involve such acts of self-telling for, at the end, all these acts of storytelling do is simply dividing the human race. In this regards he is in agreement with Goronwy Rees who holds that,

For myself it would be quite impossible to tell such a story, because at no time in my life have I had that enviable sensation of constituting a continuous personality. . . . As a child this did not worry me, and if indeed I had known at that time of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* [*The Man without Qualities*, a novel by Robert Musil], the man without qualities, I would have greeted him as my blood brother and rejoiced because I was not alone in the world; as it was, I was content with a private fantasy of my own in which I figured as Mr. Nobody.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 433.

¹¹ Ibid., 437.

¹² Goronwy Rees, *A Bundle of Sensations: Sketches in Autobiography*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), 9-10.

However, he goes further to point out that though unlike Rees, he has a perfectly good grasp of himself, as having a certain personality, he was in the first place never interested in the question, “what have I made out of my own life?” But, this does not amount to the fact that just because a person shows no interest in such questions he or she is living a life that is irresponsible. He or she does care about himself or herself and his or her life. However, the focus of his or her concern is more about how he or she is living his or her life now and here. In living such a kind of life he or she is profoundly aware of how the present is shaped by the past but the concern is not with the past as such but only with the present shaping as consequences of the past.¹³ The point that Strawson is making here is that just as musicians through constant practices, without actually having the need to recall their earlier sessions, can develop and improve their skills similarly people can develop themselves without any sort of explicit narrative reflection. So for him both the claims of ethical as well as psychological Narrative theses are false.

Narrative simply understood at this stage is defined as a conventional story told in words that involves a “certain sort of developmental and hence temporal unity or coherence to the things to which it is standardly applied.”¹⁴ Thus, for a life to qualify as narrative it must be felt, lived and construed narratively. This kind of construction, clearly involves some sort of unifying or form finding construction that goes beyond the simple act of grasping one’s life in a biologically single human being. Nor is this act identifiable to the simple act of introducing a sense of sequential record to the course of one’s life. But, when it comes to the question of apprehending life, it calls for a sort of large-scale of coherence-seeking *form-finding* tendency, which is symbolically represented by the letter [F.]¹⁵

Now, this criterion of form-finding tendency or pattern seeking tendency which is a necessary condition of Narrativity may very well lack a sense of specificity. One can be diachronic without having a sense of oneself as something that persist in time and without having a quest or a sense of “ethical-historical-characterological.”¹⁶ For instance, a person who is diachronic can be, by force of circumstances living a disjointed life with no interest in finding a narrative-developmental pattern in life [+D –F]. So one can be Diachronic while being

¹³ Strawson, “Against Narrativity,” 438.

¹⁴ Ibid., 439.

¹⁵ Ibid., 441.

¹⁶ ibid

unreflective about one's life's flow and thus the notion of form-finding qualifies as a quality which is essential but different from being diachronic, while trying to understand one's narrative engagements with life. It, being independent of and going beyond being diachronic, is said to capture something that is not only necessary but minimally sufficient for narrative.¹⁷ This captures the second quality of narrative.

This discussion on the nature of form naturally direct us to the next factor, the third component of narrative, i.e., if one can be termed as genuinely narrative then when it comes to apprehending one's life, one has to be equipped with the distinctive quality of *Story-telling* tendency [S]. Story-telling is indeed classified as a species of form-finding tendency and as far as possible, though it does not completely rule out the tendency to fabricate things it is neither to be identified solely to it. Rather the exemplary models of this feature is reflected in the works of gifted journalists or historians who for instance, in reporting a sequence of events selected from among facts tell a captivating story without distorting or falsifying it. Moreover, this skill, apart from listing the events in a correct temporal order, links them in a continuous account. So rather than falsifying life it, in apprehending the hidden developmental coherencies, is able to bring out deep personal constancies of life.¹⁸

Our discussion above concerning the story-telling tendency brings us to the fourth factor which is related to the tendency of story-telling to engage with fiction or some sort of falsification, confabulation and revisionism. This fourth qualification Stawson calls as revision[R] or revisionist tendency. This quality of revision brings with it a sense of confabulation which goes beyond the implication of merely changing one's view of life.¹⁹ In its present usage, by definition, it implies a non-conscious employment of the term. While it is true that we can be "unreliable narrators of our own lives" and there are cases where in revisions that diverted from the reality were done deliberately but this does not qualify as genuine revisions. Autobiographical memory, for instance, is an essentially constructive and reconstructive process that involves more than a simple reproductive phenomenon. In the process "memory deletes, abridges, edits, reorders, italicizes."²⁰ Nonetheless, revision can be free of fabrication despite

¹⁷ Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 442.

¹⁸ Ibid., 443.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 444.

being informed by the presence of moral emotions such as pride, self-love, conceit, shame, regret, remorse etc or it can be a case where this activity is improved by the presence of things like modesty, gratitude or forgiveness.

This activity of revision can be because one is a natural form-finder but being forgetful, he or she seeks to find coherence in the limited materials that is at his or her disposal. There are also instances where it may be taken up by someone who in their failure to find a satisfying form, out of frustration, seeks to restore a kind of self-respect. Though when one revises and commonly the revision is done in one's own favor, there are cases when revision has been counterproductive as and when one forgets to include those good things in life. Thus, while conceding that there are very few cases of narratives without revision, Strawson is of the view that "Story-telling is sufficient for Narrativity, and one can be story-telling without being revisionary."²¹ In other words, for him, since story-telling is a kind of form-finding it entails form-finding. However, apart from this relationship between the two, he does not see the need for any connection between diachronic, form-finding, story-telling and revision.

Therefore, though the urge to narratively articulate oneself may seem natural for some and perhaps helpful for others but for Strawson he sees this aspiration as "highly unnatural and ruinous." While it is true that the act of telling and retelling one's life leads to smoothing and enhancements, it is also true that the more we recall the more we risk moving further away from an accurate self-understanding of who we are. So rather than doing good we can say that it does more harm and is seen as "a gross hindrance to self-understanding."²² Moreover, while it is true that a sort of self-understanding is necessary for good life, they need nothing more than form-finding. So, certainly for Strawson, narrativity is not a part of an examined life as the task of living a good life is for many a non-narrative initiative. Rather, he is of the view that people can and do deepen their life without any sort of explicit narrative reflection, just as the musicians who can improve upon their play by practice, without feeling the need to revert back to the earlier sessions. In addition, there is no clear evidence to prove that the examined life, which is seen as essential to human existence, is always a good thing.²³ Besides, in dispelling the common suspicion that an Episodic life must be deprived in one or the other sense, he points out that a

²¹ Ibid., 445.

²² Ibid., 447.

²³ Ibid., 448.

happy-go-lucky life is considered as one of the best lives for it is a life that is vivid, blessed and profound.²⁴ So in the end, when it comes to the question of the importance of narrative in the sphere of ethics, he sees it more of an affliction than a prerequisite for good life.

3. On the Question of Diachronic or Episodic Self

One of the reasons why narrative identity as such becomes the preferred medium through which the identity of the self is articulated is because it provides a platform that makes possible for the interaction between history and fiction. Human lives for that matter become more intelligible and easily readable understood in terms of the stories that people tell about themselves. This is clearly visible in case of autobiographical narratives where self-knowledge is understood as an interpretation. Self-interpretation finds in this narrative engagements a privileged mediation for it draws its resources both from history as well as fiction,²⁵

A response to Strawson's classification of the self into Diachronic and Episodic self and his argument in favor of an Episodic self, while dismissing the idea of a Diachronic self, can be given in terms of Ricoeur's fundamental distinction between identity as sameness (*idem*) and identity as selfhood (*ipse*). Building on this distinction one can say that Strawson's failure to acknowledge and grasp the importance of Diachronic nature of the self stems from his failure to see this distinction and thus the failure to recognize the difference between selfhood and sameness. This will, as Ricoeur has pointed out, lead to obscuring the question of personal identity.

To start with, the notion of self, which figures in Strawson's arguments against the Diachronic self, specifically referred to as "an inner mental presence or self," and is qualified by him as 'I*' can be said to belong to the question of self understood more in terms of sameness. This notion of sameness is said to be possessed of different relations at different levels. Firstly, understood in a numerical sense, a thing that is designated by an invariable name does not constitute two different things, simply by virtue of it occurring twice. It is said to be one and the same thing and the notion of identity, in this case, is captured by the term "uniqueness" as

²⁴ Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 449.

²⁵ Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative identity" in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 188.

opposed to that of “plurality.” The second kind of identity is built around the notion of “similarity,” where two things, by virtue of their having strong resemblances are said to be substitutable for one another. The notion that is opposite to similarity is “different.” Interestingly, when it comes to practicality the two kinds of identities mentioned above are not exclusive to one another. Rather, when it comes to a critical moment that involves the question of re-identification of a person or a thing, present here, and that thing or the person, which or who was supposedly present there in the past, the idea of similarity is said to complement identity, understood in terms of uniqueness. An illustration of an effective working together of the two notions of identities, in establishing the identity of a thing or a person becomes visible, in those instances, wherein the identity of the person, say an undertrail, who is suspected and accused of committing a particular crime, has to be ascertained. However, in such cases, the weakness that lies with the criterion of similarity is exposed when, with the passage of time, the identity of the person in question fades. This directs us to another criterion, a third factor, which is captured in terms of the notion “uninterrupted continuity.” Here, we, for instance, in capturing a sense of change through time, speak of an oak as the same thing that is there from the seed to the tree. The notion opposite to this kind of identity is “discontinuity.” However, the notion of continuity in itself is not sufficient to explain identity of the thing in question and so it is said to serve as a supplementary criterion to that of a fourth factor. The function of continuity thus leads us to the final factor, i.e., the question of *Permanence* in time or that of sameness. Contrary to this notion of sameness is “diversity.” And the notion of permanence that results from such kind of identity is what we know as the *immutable* substratum.”²⁶

However, for Ricoeur, the question of selfhood is different from the notion of sameness or immutable substratum that we have discussed above. Not only are they different at the level of grammar, epistemology and logic but at the level of ontology. He, in trying to prove his point takes the help of Heidegger to show that the question of selfhood or what Stawson refers to in his writing as “GS the human Being” belongs to the sphere of Dasein or that of self-constancy. Ricoeur observes that, “The break between self (*ipse*) and same (*idem*) ultimately expresses that more fundamental break between Dasein and ready-to-hand/present-at-hand.”²⁷ Dasein with its capacity to question itself as to its own nature of existence and “to relate itself to being qua

²⁶ Ricoeur, “Narrative identity” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 189, 190.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

being” distinguishes itself from things that are given and manipulable or things that reflect sameness. To begin with, the kind of question to which the concept of selfhood responds is different from the question to which the concept of sameness responds. In looking for the agent or the author of the action the nature of question that the selfhood asks and responds to is to the question of “who?” rather than “What I am?” as is the case with Strawsons’ understanding of self.²⁸ Asking the question “Who?” involves an act of ascription, whereby an action is now assigned to an agent and by virtue of this ascription, the agent is said to be imputable or held responsible for the choices that are taken. This act of imputation in bringing into play a sense of blame as well as praise introduces a sense of morality to the subject matter of actions.

The only point at which the notion of sameness and selfhood intersects is precisely on the matter of permanence in time. However, confusion over how to interpret these two overlapping notions of permanence in time explains for the confusion one faces over the question of personal identity. In case of sameness, as we have pointed out earlier the question of permanence in time leads to the idea of an immutable substratum. However, when it comes to the question of self-constancy, it can be understood more in terms of the durable properties of a character, where constancy, for instance, is understood more in terms of expressions like keeping one’s promises.²⁹ Here, coherence is understood more in terms of constructing a kind of dynamic identity that is reflective of employment’s mediation between permanence and change. Hence, the kind of narrative identity that is created corresponds to the discordant concordance nature of the story itself.³⁰ And so in those circumstances, when the novel is said to approach its moment of closure, as a result of the annulling of the identity of the protagonist, understood in terms of reference to its sameness-identity, even then the question of selfhood still remains. Rather the question of self is said to return in form of the question who am I, nothing.³¹

Even, for a narrativist like David Carr, though he does not directly deal with the question of distinction between a Diachronic and an Episodic self, judging by the way his argument is constructed we can vouch that he would more be in favor of a Diachronic self. This is implied in

²⁸ Ricoeur, “Narrative identity” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 191.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

³¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 166. He is of the view that “The sentence “I am nothing” must keep its paradoxical form: “nothing” would mean nothing at all if “nothing” were not in fact attributed to an “I.” But who is I when the subject says that it is nothing? A self deprived of the help of sameness, I have repeatedly stated.”.

the way he, in order to prove the point that narrative far from distorting life or providing an escape from reality, holds narrative to be life enriching or life confirming. In order to argue for his point, he takes the help of Husserl, according to whom all experiences, even those which are considered to be the most passive, involve an implicit understanding of the need for anticipation or protention, as well as retention of the just past.³² He is of the view that a person is not simply equipped with the capacity to project and to remember. But in addition to these capacities one cannot even experience or make sense of the present, unless it is understood against the background of what it has succeeded and what we think will succeed it. In making such an observation, Carr's argument is that "Whatever else 'life' maybe, it is hardly a structureless sequence of isolated events."³³

Pushing the argument further, Carr argues that in life we have extended experiences that correspond to the temporally extended process in the world. Our experiences are to be understood as a complex configuration marked with phases that figure as parts within a larger whole. Thus, for instance a regular action like serving a tennis ball is said to consist in a single process with "interdependent" phases rather than being made up of atomic parts or "basic actions" Thus, actions and events are experienced as temporal gestalts with beginnings, middle, and ends.³⁴ And given the means-ends structure, the completion of an action is read like a practical closure or solution to a preexisting problem. This reference to planning suggests that it is through intentions that the stream of experience is narratively schematized. And this kind of "storytelling" is seen as an act where we explain our acts to ourselves as well as others.

Brian Hedden, observes that the most natural way to understand the feature of a self-binding characteristics may be in terms of intentions, which in effect are instrumental in controlling future actions.³⁵ Intentions are related to decisions and they have a important role in that they serve as the point of stability in a deliberation. He quotes Bratman in holding that "Intentions stands as fixed point in our reasoning."³⁶Its importance become clear when one

³² Carr, "Discussion: Ricoeur on Narrative" in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991),163.

³³ *Ibid.*,164

³⁴ Carr, *Time, Narrative and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University press, 1986), 47.

³⁵ Brian Hedden, *Reasons without Persons: Rationality, Identity, and Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

³⁶Michael Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987) as quoted in Brian Hedden, *Reasons without Persons: Rationality, Identity, and Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 124.

realizes that if a person was required to deliberate every moment then that would be problematic and would result in incurring substantial loss in terms of cognitive effort. Moreover, intentions in serving as a store place of deliberation act as a reminder. It in helping us to be mentally ready for anticipated actions ushers in a sense of stability and constancy for us who are limited agents, fallible in the sense that we fail to live up to the ideal of rationality. So in these ways one can say that the stabilizing role of intention is a diachronic one as its influence persists over time.³⁷

To start with Ricoeur distinguishes the understanding of intention in terms of its three usage.³⁸ The first sense of intention is in terms of having done or doing something intentionally, the second in terms of acting with a certain intention and the third in terms of “intending to . . .” He points out that the first two understandings of intention point to actions done intentionally, more in reference to the past and so they figure as secondary qualifications. It is only in the third sense of the word that the meaning contains an explicit reference to the future. He holds that a detailed conceptual analysis of the notion of intention is instrumental in showing how a nuanced understanding of the pair of “what?” and “why?” questions leads to the question “who?” This is because phenomenologically speaking intention is understood as the aiming of consciousness in the direction of something we are to do. However, as close is the tie between the intention-to and the person or the agent to whom it belongs, yet in many a case, the qualifying question “what?” of the action is in fact answered by the “why?” independent of any consideration of the relation of possession that attaches the action to the agent, the “who?”

Indeed, the application of the criterion of the question “why?” allows access to an extraordinarily diverse field, which at the end points to the “cause” in a meaningful way. However, in such cases the reason for acting and cause tend to deal more with cases that have to do with backward-looking motives. This according to Ricoeur can be seen clearly in case of G. Elizabeth Anscombe’s treatment of intention where she is more concerned with a conceptual analysis of intention that is accessible to public language and is in no way interested in a phenomenon that would be accessible to private intuition alone.³⁹ Under this scheme of

³⁷ Brian Hedden, *Reasons without Persons*.

³⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 68

³⁹ According to Anscombe intentional action is an object of description. She in her book *Intention* holds that “What distinguishes actions which are intentional from those which are not? The answer that I shall suggest is that they are the actions to which a certain sense of the question ‘Why?’ is given application; the sense is of course that in which the answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting.” (p. 9) However, for Ricoeur what Anscombe calls knowledge

undersatnding, the case of “intention to ...” falls under non-observational knowledge and is valid only as a declaration of intention. So in case of the mutual implication between the “what?” and the question “why?” the exclusive concern with the description overshadows the question “who?” This is because the question of who or that of veracity is more suited to the question of selfhood and belongs to a phenomenology of attestation that is irreducible to a criteria of description. Thus, according to Ricoeur, in case of the analysis provided by Anscombe there is a failure to account for the third use of “the intention to ...” which leads to a failure to leap toward the future or what he refers to as “the intention of the intention.” But from a phenomenological perspective the attestation of “the intention to ...” is seen as an attestation of the self (*ipse*) who in intending “places this intention on the path of promising.”⁴⁰

4. On the Question of Form-Finding Tendency

A common criticism directed against narrative is that one of the ways in which narrative differs from reality is in the manner events are presented and interrelated. In narrative, things are arranged so fictively that such imposition of form upon reality can be said to distort life. Roland Barthes, for instance, is of the view that ‘art knows no static.’⁴¹ In comparing life to a story, he points out that in a story everything is in its place within a structure with the extraneous being removed but this is not the case with life, where everything is present more in terms of ‘scrambled messages’.⁴² Similarly, for Hayden White too, in holding a view that is more or less in agreement with the preceding view, he is of the opinion that “The notion that sequences of real events possess the formal attributes of the stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origin in wishes, daydreams, reveries.”⁴³

Therefore, in comparing life with the stories that we tell and borrowing from it the element of coherence, we strive to built a sort of connectedness which Dilthey alludes to as the

without observation belongs, to the order of attestation that belongs to the question of veracity and not truth. Rather he holds that “Precisely, attestation escapes sight, if sight is expressed in propositions held to be true or false.” (*Oneself as Another*, 73).

⁴⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 73.

⁴¹ Roland Barthes, ‘Introduction à l’analyse structural des récits’, *Communications*, 8, 1966, p. 7, as quoted in Carr, “Discussion: Ricoeur on Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 161.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987) 24.

“coherence of life.”⁴⁴ This issue of coherence in life, which Stawson refers to as the form-finding tendency or put in simple words the kind of identity narrative strives to construct, can be said to be quite problematic. However, according to Ricoeur, narrative by constructing the kind of dynamic identity found in the plot creates the durable property of a character. So, narrative plots are reflective of the process of mediation that takes place between permanence and change in constructing of the identity.⁴⁵

But for Stawson, as far as this form-finding tendency of narrative is concerned, he is of the view that one can be reminded of any event in one’s life that happens to oneself* without the need for grasping one’s life as a unity in the narrative sense. Indeed, he with reference to Rees makes a point that we have in no point of our life experienced this “enviable sensation of constituting a continuous personality.” Even if he were to, for instance, come across Robert Musil’s character, the man without qualities, he would readily identify himself with the character as a blood brother.⁴⁶ To this observation, Ricoeur’s reply is that while it is true that given such situations, when the unidentifiable becomes unnamable and we have reached a point where the novel itself as such seemingly loses its narrative qualities, then certainly one experience the fear of its closure. However, he turns around and remarks that even in such cases when the loss of sameness-identity of the character seems to affect the configuration of the plot, one cannot escape the question of selfhood. Rather he holds that,

A non-subject is not nothing, with respect to the category of the subject. Indeed, we would not be interested in this drama of dissolution and would not be thrown into perplexity by it, if the non-subject were not still a figure of the subject, even in a negative mode. Suppose someone asks the question: Who am I? Nothing, or almost nothing is the reply. But it is still a reply to the question *who*, simply reduced to the starkness of the question itself.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ricoeur in *Oneself as Another*, 141 observes that “When Dilthey formed the concept of *Zusammenhang des Lebens* (the connectedness of life), he spontaneously held it to be equivalent to the concept of a life history.”

⁴⁵ Ricoeur, “Discussion” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 195

⁴⁶ Strawson, “Against Narrativity”, 438. Robert Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities* is an unfinished modernist novel in three volumes, where the protagonist, Ulrich, a 32-year-old mathematician is in search of a sense of life and reality but fails to find it. His ambivalence towards morals and indifference to life has brought him to such a state of being referred to as “a man without qualities.” Strangely, he himself is a man aware that he is indifferent to all his qualities.

⁴⁷ Ricoeur, “Narrative identity” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 196.

Thus, according to Ricoeur, the evasiveness of the answer to the question “who?” rather than negating the question intensifies it. It is precisely in such moments when the subject says that he or she is nothing then one becomes aware that it is a self dispossessed of a sense of self-sameness.

Moreover, for Ricoeur, the composition of the plot is grounded in a pre-understanding of the world of action, its meaningful structures, symbolic resources, and its temporal character.⁴⁸ Thus, following a story is a very complex operation. According to Ricoeur, the course of emplotment as a process of form-finding tendency involves the synthesis of heterogeneous elements of the story can be said to operate at three levels. First of all, it involves a synthesis of the multiple events into a unified story. Here, an event is not to be seen simply as an occurrence but as an incidence that contributes to the progress of the narrative. Moreover, the story recounted is not to be understood simply as the enumeration of the events in a successive order, it becomes an intelligible whole. Secondly, the plot also involves a synthesis of heterogeneous components into a single story that explains for its characteristics of discordant concordance or of concordant discordance.⁴⁹ It is instrumental for bringing together unintended circumstances, discoveries, the actors and the sufferers, chance or planned encounters, conflictual as well as collaborative interactions, well-devised as well as erratic means, ends, and unintended results with the frame of a single story. Finally, from the temporal point of view emplotment in composing a story, involves drawing a configuration out of a succession. Ricoeur holds that “between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience there exists a correlation that is not merely accidentalTime becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode.”⁵⁰ Most importantly, apart from the intelligibility that this

⁴⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 54.

⁴⁹ When we talk about life and recounting it, we can say that the structure of narrative reflects a play between concordance and discordance. With reference to human time, St Augustine’s treatment of it reflects the structure of time as born out of the incessant dissociation between the three aspects of the present—expectation, which he calls the present of the future, memory which he calls the present of the past, and attention which is the present of the present. Whereas when it comes to Aristotle’s definition of the plot, we say that narrative is a synthesis of the heterogeneous. Thus, in Augustine notion of time discordance wins over concordance and in Aristotle’s notion of plot concordance wins over discordance.

⁵⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol 1, 52.

configuring act brings, a well configured story in teaching something is said to reveal the universal aspects of the human condition.⁵¹

In addition, Carr, in reply to the above criticisms responded that, there is no doubt that life falls short of art in every way, it fails to match up with the formal coherence that is present in the stories. However, this is so because “to live it is to make the constant demand and attempt that it approach that coherence.”⁵² According to him, one can be sure that fictional stories do not represent reality because by definition what they portray never happened. But one of the ways in which stories can be life-like is precisely in terms of their form. That is by virtue of this form-finding tendency stories are capable of representing the way certain events, if they had happened, might have unfolded.⁵³ Moreover, he is careful to note that the kind of coherence that narrative is trying to achieve is not to be mistaken with a kind of imposition of an order “upon an incoherent, merely sequential existence but is drawn from life.”⁵⁴

5. On the Question of Story-telling Tendency

Now, we will consider the non-narrativist’s accusation that stories are told while life is lived. A response to the first part of the argument that stories are told and not lived can be had in the reply that narratives are significant because they lie at the “intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader.”⁵⁵ A text, to begin with, is not something closed rather it opens a world of possibilities which can be appropriated by the reader. The third stage of the mimetic activity shows that the act of configuration is not complete in the text but in the reader.⁵⁶ It is in the act of reading that the experience of the reader is transfigured. In this sense, by virtue of this act, the reader can be shown to belong to both worlds, his or her own world of real action and to the world of experience that is implicit in the text. And it is only when a text is hermeneutically interpreted that it begins to acquire an entirely different meaning. In the process, a text can be said to exhibit three kinds of mediation, *referentiality*, when the mediation is between man and

⁵¹ Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 22.

⁵² Carr, “Discussion” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 166.

⁵³ Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, 13.

⁵⁴ Carr, “Discussion” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 166.

⁵⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol 1, 79.

⁵⁶ According to Ricoeur, the act of narration consists of a triple mimesis which corresponds to the three-steps of describing, narrating and prescribing or to the three stages of prefiguration, configuration and refiguration. And so, it is only in the third stage of mimesis, that of refiguration, that the reader in reading the text and interpreting it brings the act of configuration to an end.

the world, *communicability*, when it is between man and man and *self-understanding*, when the mediation is between man and himself⁵⁷. Thus, for Ricoeur the dynamics of configuration that takes place at the level of the text is more of a preparation for understanding the dynamics of issues in real life.⁵⁸ It is in the act of reading that the possibility of interaction between innovation and sedimentation and the play of narrative constraints and deviations are opened up. And it is in the act of reading that configuration is completed which allows not simply for the stories to be told and retold but most importantly allows them to be “*lived in the mode of imaginary.*”⁵⁹

Coming to the second part of the criticism that life is lived not told one can start with the pre-narrative capacity of life. One is reminded once again that as long as life is not interpreted it is nothing more than a biological phenomenon. This does not at the same time mean that one has to blindly subscribe to the overly simplistic equation between life and a narration. In interpreting the meaning of life, fiction plays a mediating role. The first place of anchorage that narrative finds its place in life and its experiences is in the very structure of human acting and suffering.⁶⁰ By virtue of our competence to use languages and thus meaningfully employ this entire network of expressions and concepts we are able to distinguish between actions and mere physical movement. Thus, we are at a position where we are able to understand the whole gamut of semantics of actions which are inclusive of the project, aim, means, circumstances etc. And the parallels that we find between the conceptual network of human action and the plots of the stories that we are familiar with, enable us to narrate life itself.

Another point where narrative can be said to find its anchorage in practical life lies in how things are symbolically represented in the practical field. Recounting of actions is indeed possible because they are in the first place already articulated in signs, rules and norms. They are found to be symbolically mediated and heavily underscored by cultural anthropology. So for

⁵⁷ Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 27.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 27. Here, for Ricoeur the dynamics of configuration proper to literary creation is complete only in the joint effort of the text and the reader. The configuration of the text, especially the actualization of its capacity for being followed depends on how the text opens up the world of the readers with the possibilities it throws open for its readers. And so, in this sense, the act of reading is itself understood as a way, in which the reader can be said to have already live out his life in the fictive universe of the text.

⁶⁰ Ibid.,28.

instance, the same gesture of raising one's arm can be interpreted in a particular way depending on the particular context as saying hello, hailing a taxi or voting. This distinction is possible because symbolism provides an initial readability to actions.⁶¹ Understood in this sense, actions are already a quasi-text. The third point of anchorage where narrative finds its place in life is in terms of the "pre-narrative quality of human experience." Now that actions are always symbolically mediated and articulated in signs, so we can say that life itself is a story in its nascent stage waiting to be told. So it becomes quite obvious to speak of life as being caught up in a story because it is understandably seen as "an activity and a passion is in search of a narrative."⁶² However, for Ricoeur, this way of looking at action, as absorbed in narrative, is not restricted to our familiarity with the conceptual network of action and its symbolic mediations but also requires that we see in actions temporal qualities that call for narration.

Therefore, this call for narration is not to be understood simply as a kind of projection of literature onto life but is based on a genuine demand for narrative. This call can be seen in the sphere of our everyday life where given a chain of episodes there are certain "stories that have not yet been told" and which demands to be told.⁶³ A practical example of such kind can be witnessed in the field of psychoanalysis, where the patient brings with him scattered pieces of lived stories and their dreams, fragments of episodes which do not match with one another. However, in the process of the therapy, the analysand in helping the patient to draw a narrative which is more bearable and intelligible allows him or her to take charge of the narration and assume responsibility. Here one can see that a story of life does grow out of stories that have been repressed and have not been recounted and which, when the subject takes charge of, becomes his personal identity. This goes on to show that narrative function is an essential component of self-understanding and that an examined life for that matter is a life that is recounted.⁶⁴

6. On the question of Revisionist Tendency

In the midst of all these happenings while we are trying to create an identity of our own Carr brings in two very interesting observation and to which I believe our present study, in providing

⁶¹ Ibid.,29.

⁶² Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 29.

⁶³ Ibid., 30

⁶⁴ Ibid.

a response, can supplement and thus strengthen our understanding of narrative identity. Firstly, he observes that “unlike the author of fiction we do not create the materials we are to form: we are stuck with what we have in the way of characters, capacities and circumstances.”⁶⁵ In response to this concern our suggestion is that why don’t we in order to address this issue, consider taking into account the role of moral imagination, which would help us to see things in terms of new possibilities? To the second observation that “Unlike the historian we are not describing events already completed but are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end,”⁶⁶ one can strengthen this position in proposing that since our story is incomplete and open-ended, why don’t we at this point introduce the notion of authenticity. We can with the intent to build a story, that is truly reflective of who we are, employ the concept of authenticity. This would not only help us to carefully choose those events that are truly reflective of who we are but would help us to guide the progress of our story in the desired direction, towards that which is good. According to Carr, narrative is our Primary means of organizing our experience of time as it can help elucidate our pre-theoretical past.⁶⁷ This is possible because our very experience of time and social existence is pervaded by narrative structure, independently of us contemplating the past. So in this sense, literary narratives are based on and are prefigured out of certain features of life, action and communication.⁶⁸

As far as the accusation of revisionism is concerned, reverting back to Barthes’ observation as well as objection that in a good story everything has been smoothed to the extent that all the extraneous noise have been eliminated, Carr in response to the question how and why such selections be made provides the following explanations. In a good story, a process of selection and omission becomes inevitable for without it the story would be cluttered and its presentation rendered inefficient. So, primarily, the reason why, in the process of narrating a story, we are told just what is necessary with all the extraneous noise or static details cut off, is for the simple reason that such exercise ‘further the plot.’⁶⁹ We would also like to push forward our point that it is at such junctures, when one is faced with the question of selection, the need for the intervention of the role of authenticity can be felt. This is because an exercise of

⁶⁵ Carr, “Discussion” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 166

⁶⁶ Carr, “Discussion” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 166.

⁶⁷ Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁹ Carr, “Discussion” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 165.

authenticity in the process of selection can help us to arbitrate in making choices or performing actions that are choice-worthy in themselves. However, to this response, one can object in saying that unlike stories life makes no such revision for in life all things that are static are also present.

Pushing the argument further, Carr in reply to the objection just mentioned before makes a very important observation that “Narratives do select; and life is what they select from. But it hardly follows that in life no selection takes place.”⁷⁰ Our capacity for selection, he holds, is reflected in our competence for attention and following across more or less long term and complex plans. Thus, what actually appears as extraneous are not simply left out but in the process sorted out, ranked in terms of importance and then pushed to the background for later use. All these processes of selection as well as classifications become easier to understand when one realizes the fact that the true essence of freedom is captured in making those choices that in addition to them being decided freely are expressive of who one is or are indexed to the self.

All these intricate processes of selection that speaks of a language of personal resonance, now direct us to a more important question of who is behind all these actions. And a response in this direction points to the author or the narrator who as Hayden white would say is “the voice of authority”⁷¹ or in this case we can say, “the voice of authenticity.” We in planning our lives and in composing our stories are the ones who decide the course of our life and determine where to focus our attention on. And this act is not to be seen simply as an act where we in narrating ourselves intent it for the other who forms a part of the recalcitrant audience but at the same time it is also an act to cajole and convince our own selves who form part of that audience.⁷² This realization requires that we put an end to all pretension that we are anything like the author of our life because not only do we have no control over our own circumstance but we have no control over our plans as “the arrows of fortunes” swings in opposite directions.

The Self as we are now already familiar with, in a narrative understanding, is neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution. It is never

⁷⁰ Carr, “Discussion” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 165.

⁷¹ Hayden White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality” in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 1, On Narrative (Autumn), University of Chicago Press, 1980, 23. He is of the view that, “The authority of the historical narrative is the authority of reality itself; the historical account endows this reality with form and thereby makes it desirable, imposing upon its processes the formal coherency that only Stories possess.”

⁷² Carr, “Discussion” in *On Paul Ricoeur*

given at the start but arises as a subjectivity that is instructed by cultural symbols that are handed down in the form of tradition. The grounding of the self on such traditions keeps the self from falling into a form of self-deficient, self-absorbed and deficient empathic skills, away from the narcissistic tendency of which authenticity has often been accused of. And by tradition here we do not mean “the inert transmission of a lifeless residue” but rather “the living transmission of an innovation which can always be reactivated by a return to the most creative moments of poetic composition.”⁷³ This means that self-understanding involves the play of sedimentation and innovation which is at work in every tradition. Innovation, thus, functions as a polar opposite to that of tradition but at the same time, it remains a rule-governed initiative, it does not come out of nowhere but remains a calculated deviance. And it is the variation between these poles that narrative imagination acquires its own historicity as well as articulates its own creativity.

Consequently, if one is to explain human action and in the process articulate in a plot the meaning and the intentions of his action then one cannot conceive it “exclusively on the basis of the atemporal social sciences (if there ever are any), but must also take into account that form of intelligibility always associated with narration.”⁷⁴ When it comes to the forms of explanation employed by natural sciences and that of human action Taylor makes a very sharp distinction. In case of natural sciences which are based on a nomologically hermetic model of explanation, he shows that the explanandum is related to the explanans in such a way that the former is subsumed simply as a part or aspect, an example of the explanans that constitute the totality of the real.⁷⁵ The problem with invoking such kind of structures that subsumes the role of explanation would especially fall into a kind of reductionism where, for instance, the fact that someone jumps from the top of the building is explicable in terms of Newton’s laws, where the fall is as explicable as for any other body.⁷⁶ This obviously is the type of relation advocated by logical positivist as well as by various ‘structuralisms.’

However, the relation between structure and event in the second kind of explanation or that of the *langue-parole* is one of renewal, which normally explains best human actions. And

⁷³ Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, 24.

⁷⁴ Taylor, “Discussion” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 174.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 175

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 178

this kind of explanations is more closely aligned to a narrative model.⁷⁷ Here, in this case, a language may be seen as a structure of rules with possible formations and transformations. But it is only through repeated acts of communication by members of a linguistic community that the structure can be said to gain real existence. Or in other words, practices are never understood simply in terms of a state of manifestation of structure, they are not reducible to an example.⁷⁸ So, under this scheme where everything is transformed by structures of renewal there is an opening of possibilities. Now, we can say that the opening of such possibilities fits into our scheme of making allowances or finding a parallel in moral imagination wherein as we have observed in our discussion in the earlier chapter as far as moral laws are concerned they do not constitute the final authority but at best can be considered as guidelines in the pursuit for that which is good.

Consequently, in examining the relationship between life and art that is related to the question of refiguration, a good grasp of the act of the three mimesis that is involved in the act of configuration would clear a lot of uncertainties between the two aspects of narrative. In the search for a meaning in life where history seems to be crippled by discordances one can say that it is only through the act of narrative configuration or mimesis II and that of reconfiguration or Mimesis III that the scattered events of life are transformed into well-made fictions. However, the play of these two Mimesis is decidedly based on Mimesis I which provides the retroactive reference. Life in itself is an inchoate narrative with its pre-narrative character of life that contains actions. However, these events are symbolically mediated and more in need of articulation. So what is articulated or configured by a narrative have their bases on those actions which are present in the pre-narrative stage. Meanwhile, this act of narrative configuration or mimesis as such is not to be mistakenly reduced to an act of “imitating” alone, it is an act of poetic creation that involves “revelation” as well as “transformation.”⁷⁹ In the process, life needs to be understood through literature for life “in the raw” is beyond our reach. This is because in

⁷⁷ “The *langue-parole* dichotomy was introduced into linguistics by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), who used the analogy of a chess game to illustrate what it entails. To engage in a game of chess both players must first know the *langue* of chess--the rules of movement and the overall strategy of how to play. *Langue* imposes constraints on, and provides a guide to, the choices each player can make in the act of playing the game. The actual choices characterize *parole*--the ability to apply the abstract knowledge of chess (*langue*) to a specific game-playing situation.” (Marcel Danesi, *Second Language Teaching: A View From the Right Side of the Brain*. Springer, 2003).

⁷⁸ Ibid., 177

⁷⁹ Ricoeur, “Discussion” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 180.

the first place we as unspeaking children are born into a world that is symbolically mediated and full of our predecessor's narratives. Thus, what is prefigured for us is already a refiguration of those who precedes us. However, this circle is not a vicious circle but an extension of progressive meaning.⁸⁰

At the same time, in establishing a relationship between life and history there is a need to maintain the difference between what is reflected in a theory of action and a theory of history without necessarily separating them. The difference between them is that in the former we are particularly concerned with the motive and the agents deliberation but in the latter we are concerned not just with action but with their non-intentional effects, indeed non-volitional effects and circumstances which appear only in retrospection.⁸¹ It is in such circumstances that Ricoeur furthers the argument made by Taylor concerning the nomological and langue-parole model where he holds that in case of historical explanation the two methods of explanation, i.e., nomological as well as language-parole model do not function as alternative theories but are seen to work together in a mixed explanatory model.⁸² In addition, the fact that history and action are closely inter-woven is brought out clearly in the works of Hanna Arendt who in writing on the concepts of labour, work and action has, in examining the relation between the two, observed that action normally makes an appeal to history because history discloses the who of the action.⁸³

This takes us back to the question on the nature of relationships that exist between history and fiction, in the course of exchanges between the two of them is it the question of difference or that of similarity that holds dominance? Well, basically there is a difference between the two and failure to recognize and maintain the difference between the two can give rise to complications in understanding life. It can lead to a kind of situation where, for instance, people like Faurison ended up dismissing the reality of what happened in Auschwitz as a fiction in holding that

⁸⁰ Ibid.,182.

⁸¹ Ibid.,181.

⁸² Ibid.,183. Here Ricoeur borrows this concept of a mixed explanatory mode from Henrik von Wright's analysis, in *Explanation and Interpretation*, where he is trying to explain why the epistemological status of history is so extraordinarily unstable. And the reason for this according to von Wright is because historical explanation contains both nomic as well as teleological segments.

⁸³ Hanna Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958),182.

nothing in real life as such has happened.⁸⁴ But, there also comes a point in time, when history and fiction cannot be kept apart but have to interact for the act of narration to materialize. And one of the points of intersection where the two can be seen to come together, according to Ricoeur, is made possible in terms of the notion of debt.⁸⁵ Such interventions as far as Ricoeur is concerned help us to establish a communion between the living and the death. Such awareness makes us not only conscious of the fact that we are not simply inheritor of the past but shows that we are by virtue of being the inheritors of the past, we are indebted to it. So, we are debtors to those who lived before us and have a duty to render the “having been” of those whom history has forgotten.⁸⁶ So in case of the above example, our reading of history cannot simply stop at the dead as “being no more” but be informed by a duty of restitution, the right of its “having been.” And one can clearly see in such explanations, where fiction and history intersects to create an understanding of human action and therefore the human agent or the author, the workings of moral imagination, in creating situations which we in the first place would never have foreseen or considered as a possibility.

Moreover, reverting back to the concept of debt, the reach of moral imagination in re-envisioning the world is such that it covers not only the past but its concern is also to do with the future. For Ricoeur, a man of fiction is no less simply a debtor in terms of the past, i.e., in terms of debt that is concerned with the idea of “having been” but to a vision of the world that precedes him as a “Logos” which (pre)occupies him.⁸⁷ It is with regard to this vision that one can talk of a world to which one can never cease doing justice and so an artist is in this sense no less indebted than the historian. In addition, history also in reflecting on that part of the past which is inchoate and implicit brings to focus that part of the history which it has forgotten. Viewed from this point, history as such is impeded with inhibited possibilities, possibilities which were prevented from happening and thus coming into existence as some other events happened that took over their place. So, for every instance of event that happened, by virtue of the fact that it has been realized, it has usurped the place of some other impeded possibilities. Thus, for instance, in reading the historical past, the history of the victims with the story of their impeded possibilities are rendered no more for what we are exposed to is only the history of those of the conquerors.

⁸⁴ Ricoeur, “Discussion” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 186.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ricoeur, “Discussion” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 187.

In such situations, fiction can be said to come to the aid of history in liberating those inhibited possibilities by making them happen even though this possibility is realized only in a potential mode.⁸⁸

7. Narrative Re-visited

Narrative identity is therefore the fragile offshoot resulting from the union of history and fiction. The kind of identity that comes out of such union is a practical identity that is given in response to the question, “who is the agent or the author?” Basically, to start with, an answer to this is a person, an agent or an author, designated with a proper name, someone who can be said to be the same throughout a life that stretches from birth to death [+D]. It is a response where we, in identifying the “who” of the action, begin to tell the story of a life or construct an identity narratively. Without the recourse to such an identity the question of personal identity would be rendered redundant and we would be caught in the dilemma of either resorting to an immutable substantial self or a free floating illusory self [+S]. However, as it has been pointed out earlier this narration can happen only when we substitute the sense of self understood in terms of sameness with a sense of self that is marked by self-constancy. The difference between the two lies in the distinction between formal identity and the kind of identity that we acquire through the mediation of the narrative function. Here, self characterized as *idem* or sameness is said to be that which is refigured by the reflective application of narrative configurations. But the *ipse* or the identity of self-constancy is reflective of the dynamic nature of life and includes change, mutability, within the cohesion of a lifetime [+F]. Here, the story of our life is refigured by all the truthful as well as fictive stories that we tell about ourselves, as is the case with autobiography. And as Proust has shown we appear to be playing both the role of the reader as well as writer of our own life. And such kind of refiguration makes this life comparable to that of a cloth that is woven of stories told.⁸⁹

However, there seems to be a circularity in our explanation of narrative identity and the problem associated with this kind of difficulty is because of the failure to make clear the distinction between identity as sameness and identity as selfhood. The reason for such a

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol 3, Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 246.

confusion is because the question of selfhood intersects with the question of self “at one precise point: permanence in time.”⁹⁰ At first the question of permanence in time seems to belong exclusively to *idem*-identity understood in terms of an immutable substratum. But the question that needs to be asked here is, does the concept of selfhood imply a form of permanence in time? If yes, is it similar to the notion of permanence that is applicable to the determination of a substratum or is it different from it? Ricoeur, in response to this question, in order to show how these two understandings of permanence are tied up so closely yet distinct, introduces two models of permanence in time which he holds are “at once descriptive and emblematic.” The first is in terms of the permanence in character, which is reflective of the almost completely mutual overlapping nature of the of *idem* and of *ipse*, while the second factor is reflective of the kind of constancy that is understood in terms of faithfulness to oneself, understood in terms of keeping one's word. Here, while character expresses the issue of *idem* and *ipse* overlapping with one another, the second case of promise keeping is representative of how there is a gap between *ipse* and *idem* and irreducible to one another.

However, we will confine our reading to an understanding of self constancy understood in terms of a person's character. The question of character in particular shows how, narrative in mediating at the point, where the notion of *idem* and *ipse* tend to coincide, constructs an identity. Character by definition are “those distinctive mark which permit the reidentification of a human individual as being the same.”⁹¹ In this sense a person is said to exhibit those features of sameness understood in terms of numerical identity, extreme resemblance, uninterrupted continuity and permanence in time. So character seems to be a way of existence where our outlook towards the things of the world, its ideas and value is determined by the finiteness of our perspective. However, what seem to be immutable at first changes with a reinterpretation of character understood as an acquired disposition. This is when Ricoeur holds that,

“the identity of character expresses a certain adherence of the “what?” to the “who?” Character is truly the “what” of the “who.” It is no longer exactly the “what” external to the “who,” as was the case in the theory of action, where one could distinguish between what someone does and the one who does something (and we saw the riches and the pitfalls of this distinction, which leads directly

⁹⁰ Ricoeur, “Narrative Identity” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 192.

⁹¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 119.

to the problem of ascription). Here it is a question of the overlapping of the “who” by the “what,” which slips from the question “Who am I?” back to the question “What am I?”⁹²

While keeping in mind the difference between *idem* and *ipse* as well as the relationship they share, it has to be noted that the connection between self-constancy and narrative identity points to a very important fact. It is the fact that the self of self-knowledge is different from the egoistical and narcissistic self which the critics of modernity have always been denouncing. The self here is a self that is reflective of an examined life, a virtue which Socrates has been insistence of. Purged off by the cathartic effects of narrative it yields a life that is to a large extent free of infantile archaism and fruitful to the extent that it can be applied to the individual as well as the community [+R]. This story of a life is constituted through a series of rectifications applied to previous narratives. This circularity between the character and the narrative that both expresses and shapes the character is illustrative of the three-fold mimesis of pre-narrative, narrative and reconfiguration. Here, the third mimetic relation, which is an outcome of the endless rectification of a previous narrative by a subsequent one leads us back to the first relation by way of the second relation. Thus, for Ricoeur, “narrative identity is the poetic resolution of the hermeneutic circle,”⁹³ one that now we can say is inclusive of the four forms of narrative [+D +F +S +R]. And one of the main consequence that is the outcome of such existential analysis of man as being entangled in stories is that narrating is a secondary process grafted in stories.⁹⁴ In this way one becomes the narrator and the hero of our life without actually becoming the author of our lives.⁹⁵

However, one cannot help but agree with Ricoeur that there are certain limitations from which the notion of narrative identity suffers and a brief explanation as to what are the weaknesses from which it suffers from becomes crucial. In the first place, narrative identity is not a stable and seamless identity. Certainly, narrative identity does provide a common ground for the possible interplay of history and fiction. However, in the exchange of roles between the need of chronicle by history, on one hand and the imaginative variations provided by the

⁹² Ibid., 122.

⁹³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 248.

⁹⁴ Ricoeur, “Life in quest of Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 30

⁹⁵ Ibid., 32

fictional component, on the other hand, there is always the push and pull factor. This friction between the two forces explains for the destabilized nature of narrative and “narrative identity thus becomes the name of a problem at least as much as it is that of a solution.”⁹⁶

Secondly, the question of self-constancy is not exhausted by narrative identity. The act of reading or reconfiguration shows that in our narrative discourse it is true to a certain extent that we use our imagination more than the will. We are constantly engaged in a world of thought experiments that provides us with the possibility to inhabit worlds that are alien to us. And gradually there comes a time in reading, a moment of impetus, which prompts us to be different. But this is realized only when the person in taking a decision says, “Here I stand!” and this is the moment when narrative identity can be said to have truly arrived at self-constancy. This shows that a narrative in challenging the claim of ethics to be “the sole judge of the constitution of subjectivity,” is in itself not deprived of evaluative or prescriptive dimension.⁹⁷ Every narrative persuasion implicitly or explicitly informs us of a new way of looking at the world. Yet, at the end it is for the reader, the initiator of action to choose from among those possibilities that is brought forth by reading. And it is at this point that the notion of narrative identity encounters its limit and has to connect with its non-narrative components in the construction of an acting self.

⁹⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol 3., 249.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

1. Narrative as Reasons Structured

One of the advantages of opting for a narrative account is that it allows the self to construct an identity, that is applicable both to the life of an individual as well as to the history of a nation. The primary reason behind choosing a narrative model is because human lives become more readily comprehensible when they are grasped in the form of the stories we hear, be it in terms of fiction or history. This explains for why the concept of narrative identity is becoming a more preferred choice than those accounts of identity that are concern with and built around questions of substance, or bodily continuity, or memory. As we have been discussing, all through the course of this work, the allowance of the possibility in narrative to engage with the question of self-understanding in a hermeneutical way has helped us to move from the pair of “What? – why?” question to the question of “who?”¹ This explains for how the question of self has moved beyond the dilemma of choosing between the extremities of cogito and anticogito.

Here, we in approaching the question of self and in asking the question “who?” are engaged with the question of self identity that allows us to proceed gradually from a reflection on the semantics of action to the agent himself or herself, who is understood as an acting and suffering individual. Again, the concern with the question “who is the agent referred to?” takes us further to examine the nature of relationship that exists in a dialogue between identity as sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*). But this is as far as narration can take us, however it in realizing the incompleteness of the self at this plane, points to the need for a dialectic between selfhood and the other. This dialectic take us to the most important question that can be asked of the “who?” which is “who is the moral subject of Imputation?”²

However, such a construction of self-identity makes the conception of identity somewhat unstable, making it susceptible and vulnerable to various objections. But taking into consideration the objections that have been put forward against narrative identity, and while working towards a improvement of its structure in addressing the weaknesses that is inherent in

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans, Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992),17.

² *Ibid.*, 167.

it, one can, on the hindsight, perhaps see in these weaknesses an advantage. Basically to have a conception of self that is reflective and accommodative of the contingency and revisability of identity reflective of life's process is better than resorting to a conception of self that is built around the notion of an all-or-nothing model, as is the case with the idea of a substantial self or the illusive self. Rather one can say that this unstable nature of narrative helps maintain a respectable distance from the impermeability of the cogito seen as resulting from its immediacy and at the same time ensures that narrative does not yield itself to the fleeting nature of a disintegrated self as is with the Nietzschean concept of a self deconstructed. This is because the contingency of questions that the question "who?" poses have for their thematic unity human action, a unity that is not to be mistaken as the unity imposed upon by an ultimate foundation but is more in the nature of an analogical unity. Following which, in our attempt to understand the self one should not treat human action as a fundamental mode of being, understood in terms of "being-as-substance" but against the background of plurality, seeing it more as "the *meanings* of being."³ Moreover, the inevitability of a dialectic with the other than the self apart from countering the ultimate foundation of cogito ensures that the conception of narrative identity does not fall into a kind of tautology. Finally, the type of certainty that narrative stands for is understood in terms of a sense of attestation which is different from the epistemic exaltation of the cogito. Attestation presents itself as a kind of belief, yet at the same time it is one that is different from a doxic belief. The kind of belief that attestation subscribe is understood more in terms of "I believe-in" rather than "I believe-that" – which is expressive of a doxic belief.⁴

Reflecting on the role of emplotment and its function in a narrative we can observe that apart from its standard function of synthesizing heterogeneous factors between the multiplicity of events and a unified story, concordance and discordance and succession and configuration, it is also said to involve a kind of intelligibility where reasons can be said to be structured. Aristotle, for instance, is of the view that every well-told story teaches something more, it is said to reveal the universal aspects of the human condition. This is because narrative understanding is said to articulate practical wisdom. Narrative as the art of storytelling involves exchanges of experiences, which are not to be understood in terms of exchanges of scientific observations but the popular exchanges of practical wisdom. And this wisdom is inclusive of estimations and

³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

evaluations of actions that are subjected to approval or disapproval and for which the agents are in turn held accountable for praise or for blame.

Therefore, poetry, for instance, in its narrative form is said to bring to imagination and its mediation, various images that are representative of the many *thought experiments* by which we learn to link together the ethical aspects of human conduct and the resulting happiness and misfortune. And these experiences that the poetry projects are representative of the universal of which Aristotle refers to. This narrative understanding or intelligibility, which Ricoeur holds as an epistemological corollary of emplotment, is said to reveal “deep structures” which are earlier unknown to those following or recounting the story. It is for this reason narratology is said to occupy a place on level with that of rationality. Thus, Ricoeur holds that while emplotment is said to constitute the creative centre of narrative, narratology is said to constitute “the rational reconstruction of the rules underlying poetical activity.”⁵

In addition, narrative activity is said to have a life and history of its own that is entrenched in a culture of tradition which explains for the rootedness of narrative. This is in response to the objection raised by the critics who are apprehensive of the self ending up rather as “an ‘illusion’ serving as an ‘expedient’ on behalf of preserving life.”⁶ Nevertheless, by tradition we are in no way referring to a process of “inert transmission of lifeless residue” but “the living transmission of an innovation.” In this sense, tradition is understood as resulting from an interaction between innovation and sedimentation. Talking of the process of sedimentation we mean an organization of the kinds of emplotment that help us to classify narratives, for instance, as a tragedy, a social drama or others.

However, even these mode of classifications are not to be seen as something that is rigid but one that involves a process of history. Even, the underlying principles that govern the process of sedimentation is said to undergo gradual changes in response to the process of innovation, which is manifested in terms of acceptance as well as resistance. Therefore, everything that is new, in the sense that it is an original production qualifies as a work of innovation before it is later on classified as belonging to a particular group. However, even in the case of innovation,

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, “Life in quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur Narrative and Interpretation* ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 24.

⁶ Nietzsche, “On truth and Lies,” p. 79 as quoted in Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 12

the process concerning it remains a rule-governed exercise. Now, applying this argument to the case of imagination, we cannot speak of innovations as having originated from nowhere. Obviously, there is always a tussle between the act of servile repetition and an innovative process, however this process of divergence is many a time deliberate and calculated. Thus, Ricoeur points out that “The variations between these poles gives the productive imagination its own historicity and keeps the narrative tradition a living one.”⁷

Another, important factor that have all along informed the progress of our study and merits to be mentioned here is the concept of imputation, that falls under the notion of ascription and finds its reference especially in the dialectic of the self and other than the self. According to Ricoeur, “Imputability, we shall say, is the ascription of action to its agent, *under the condition of ethical and moral predicates* which characterize the action as good, just, conforming to duty, done out of duty, and, finally, as being the wisest in the case of conflictual situations.”⁸ Understood from a specific viewpoint, to say that something is imputable is to say that, included in the account of that agent are things such as rewards or punishments, profits or damages that may follow. On the other hand there is an alternate view which holds that the act of imputing does not simply mean following a first-order percept of placing an action, under the category of that which is permissible or impermissible, but in addition to this precept the focus is also on the application of the second order percepts directed towards the agent, who can be held culpable or inculpable.⁹ Consequently, it is to the self, who is capable of passing through the entire course of the ethico-moral determinations of an action, that action becomes imputable; a course where at the end self-esteem becomes conviction.

Thus, imputation when placed in the discourse of the dialectic of selfhood and others, understood in terms of responsibility, can be said to share its relationship with temporality at three levels. Viewed from the past, the notion of responsibility takes the form of the idea of a

⁷ Ricoeur, “Life in quest of Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 25

⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 292.

⁹ *Ibid*, 292-93. Here, Ricoeur in highlighting the importance of the notion of imputability points to the existence of two different views of it. The earlier definition of imputation is that which is given by A. Lalande which Ricoeur holds adds nothing to the specific causation of the agent. The second definition is based on a definition given by Alan Donagan who in making a distinction between first-order precepts as related to human action and the second-order precepts as related to the mind of the agent brings out the distinction between “objective” and “subjective” precepts. This way of distinction made between the two precepts, where the second order precepts is found subordinate to first-order ones, is found reflected in popular definitions that talks of blame and praise.

debt. Here, in as much as we understand that there is a past that affects us, without it being entirely our own working, there is a sense of recognizing our indebtedness with respect to the past which has made us what we are. Viewed from the future, responsibility implies that we assume the consequences of our actions, that the events are the results of our own work even though they primarily have “not been expressly foreseen and intended.” These prospective and retrospective notions of responsibility are said to overlap and jointly taken together are visible in terms of our responsibility that concerns the present. In this sense, Ricoeur holds that “Holding oneself responsible is, in a manner that remains to be specified, accepting to be held to be the same today as the one who acted yesterday and who will act tomorrow.”¹⁰

2. Role of Authenticity and Moral Imagination

Aware of the innumerable difficulties that are attached to the question of self-identity and narrative construction in particular, the study as such has been an attempt to examine, whether with the introduction of the concept of authenticity and moral imagination we can have a stronger and more convincing explanation for narrative self-identity. So here we will in brief examine the contribution that the two factors have made to the question of narrative of self-identity.

A. Authenticity

The importance of the role of authenticity in organizing and strengthening narrative can be defended on the ground that the question “How should one live our life?” hold relevance given the elusive nature of life and the fact that we may lose track of ourselves. It inevitability becomes evident from the fact that while it is true that narratives do select and in the process an individual in narrating a story is said to create a sense of himself or herself as characters in a developing story, this selection is not something that happens in vacuum. This selection as Carr has pointed is made from life itself and this capacity for attention according to Carr is nothing other than a reflection of our capacity to select because life itself is characterized by a process of selection.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid, 294-95.

¹¹ David Carr, “Ricoeur on Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 165. He in referring to the process of selection that takes place and in tracing back all these to the self writes, “And whose narrative voice is accomplishing all this? None but our own, of course.”

So when a person says that his or her actions are not random events but a result of the choices that he or she has made in response to the particular situation, informed by the past and the future possibilities, what he or she is actually pointing to is our capacity for attention.

So in the search for the type of narrative that would be fitting to stand as an account that is reflective of who one is, we can in taking the help of Rousseau, say that the process of choice making of the narrative should not be influenced by a false sense of self-pride or external forces but a sense of genuineness that has a personal resonance with the narrator. This sense of genuineness is achievable because we are, in a sense, beings whose being is always at issue and who cares about who and what we are. The fact that we care and define who we are is made concrete in our taking of responsibility and in our “choosing to choose a kind of being-one's-self” in the face of our thrownness.¹² This act of resolute commitment, according to Heidegger, in our day-to-day actions help us to define ourselves as someone who is not a “they” in his or her “average everyday” mode of being. Yet, interestingly this authentic existence is not to be understood that is something different and floating above our everyday fallenness.¹³ Rather, it is only a modified way in which everydayness is seized upon in gaining a “phenomenological seeing’ that help us to uncover the conceal dimension of our life, our authentic self.

Another interesting feature that is revealed in the course of the search for authenticity is based on the observation that there is nothing such as values that are given, transcendent to humans, and essential in defining a thing. Turning to Sartre we can say that on one hand, we share with the other entities of the world certain concrete characteristics that accounts for the facticity or the nature of “in themselves” yet at the same time, we are distinct insofar as we through a kind of reflective self-awareness, are capable of distancing ourselves from what is “in itself”. This capacity for introduction a “not” or a “nonbeing” in putting a distance is what accounts for our capacity to organize the world around us into a meaningfully differentiated whole.¹⁴ So understood in this way the notion of authenticity is not limited to explaining how individuals are accountable for their identities, but also for the way the world presents to us in

¹² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962 [1927]),314.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992a [1943]), 114

our experiences. This points to how the notion of freedom to choose is related with a freedom to determine.

Unlike Sartre, who talks of transcendence, Taylor keeping in mind the danger that a self-determining freedom might poses for authenticity grounds his conception of authenticity in a web of locution which he holds an individual can never really transcended. While he believes that there is “a certain way of being human that is my way,”¹⁵ his understanding of Authenticity is structured dialogically, in and through our interactions with others in the community. He holds that there are two sets of conditions that serve as the conditions for a meaningfully engagement with authenticity. First of all, it presupposes the existence of “horizons of significance” or ethical values such as history, the demands of nature, fellow human beings and the call of God, only against which an action or an affirmations stands out as substantial bases of human identity.¹⁶ The call for authenticity also involves the need for “recognition” or esteem for being the particular individuals we are which no we can say is reflective of the dialectic between self and the other in a narrative. This need for recognition is based on the principle of “equal value of different identities” and stems from the universal need to craft a distinctive identity for oneself.¹⁷ Thus, authenticity not only demands the recognition of concrete others but also a critical engagement with a common vocabulary of shared value.

B. Moral Imagination

Particularly, in our attempt to live a meaningful life, the question of how we decide and choose the possibilities open to us counts because our choices define who we are and determine our relation with others. In such situation, moral imagination can be helpful in heightening our ability to perceive relevant situations and make us sensitive to issues which we might have been indifferent to or unaware of. It, in giving us a glimpse into the lives of individuals different from our own or of a life we cannot have access to, enable us to step outside our own narrow scheme of things. This is because our choices in substantially reflecting on our own concerns, goals, values, and imaginative appreciation of the world help cultivate and deepen our ethical insight. The underlying assumption here is that, given a particular situation, the exercise of moral

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, (Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1991), 28-29.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

imagination is essential, because it not just enhances but also redefines the scope of our possibilities.¹⁸

Understood in terms of function, moral imagination can be said to have an exploratory as well as a corrective function.¹⁹ Part of the exploratory function of moral imaginations is to acquaint us with what we conventionally think constitutes a good life. However as we step outside our own circle and become acquainted with others we learn that conventional possibilities available to us do not exhaust the possibilities of life but are a subset of it. This realization not only helps increase the number of possibilities but also expand the breadth of our moral possibilities. Apart from this exploratory function, moral imagination can also be said to help us gain greater control over our lives in reducing the discrepancy between what we actually believe and what is reasonable to believe, concerning the possibilities. It helps us to overcome the obstacles of falsification of facts that were prevalent in our earlier appraisal and reach a realistic estimate of what we can do with the possibilities presently available to make our lives better.

Following Nussbaum's observation we are more aware that a moral situation is not something to which rules can apply but a situation from which moral demand arises. Moral imagination, in ushering a refined sense of sensitivity, allows for a response that is "highly context specific and nuanced and responsive to thing whose rightness could not be captured in a description that fell short of the artistic."²⁰ In this case, literature with its capacity to represent and draw attention to the concrete particularities of life provides a vast experimental field where one can try out various aspects of a well-lived life. Moreover, such imaginations in characterizing life more richly, enables us to become the reader of our own life and create an ethical structure that is reflective of who we are. This is made possible because moral imagination is instrumental in bringing together the empirical as well as practical aspect of life.

¹⁸ Johnson defines moral imagination as "an ability to imaginatively discern various possibilities for acting within a given situation and to envision the potential help and harm that are likely to result from a given action" (Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, Chicago: Chicago University press, 1993: 202).

¹⁹ John Kekes, "Moral Imagination, Freedom and Humanities," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 28 1991, 104.

²⁰ Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 154.

Empirical in the sense that it allows us to draw from life experiences and practical in the sense that it helps create a situation by which human beings can live, and live together.²¹

The role of moral imagination is also such that when it comes to the question of our relationship with the other, the curiosity that we develop through reading helps identify him or her as somebody with qualitative differences and accordingly help us to cultivate a sympathetic responsiveness to the other's needs. It help us to see the other not merely as an object or a passive recipient of benefits and compassion but in acknowledging his or her agency teaches us to respect his or her voice and rights. Thus, one of the most important roles that moral imaginations can play is that it in taking us out of our comfort zone challenges us.

Moving across to Taylor's perception of moral imagination, we can say that he, in outlining the framework within which moral imagination is said to operate, brings into focus the area within which the self exists. This involves contextualizing one's moral experiences and judgments against a set of moral parameters. This framework in marking out the horizon helps us to measure the meaning of life and reflect upon the direction of our quest for life. So, here the nature of the dialectical relationship that the self shares with the framework is of such that it renders the self disoriented with the loss of such horizon.²² Thus, the recognition that some features of our self regarding moral self-constitution are universal and that the choices that we make can be objectively judged and be rationally discussed provides a foothold for the operation of moral imagination and avoid its fall into moral subjectivism.

Humans, according to Taylor, are strong evaluators and so the range of desires that humans experience can be arranged in terms of hierarchy with some of them placed higher or more admirable than others.²³ This arrangement of good has a major influence on how one's individual moral horizon gets articulated and is oriented. Living within such strongly qualified horizons is what constitutes a human agency and one can provide a convincing answer to the question, who am I? only when one is sure of where he or she stands.²⁴ However, in constructing one's identity Taylor holds that "One is a self only among other self. A self can never be

²¹ Ibid., 25.

²² Charles Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 18,19.

²³ Ibid., 3, 20. Taylor is of the view that this act or capacity for evaluation is distinctively an essential feature of moral life.

²⁴ Ibid., 27

described without reference to those who surround it.”²⁵ This is because that which is good is articulated and partly constituted in a moral and evaluative language which is said to be possible only within a language community. However, objections can be raised concerning those situations when the question of an individual’s identity is about the person who in finding his or her own stand declares independence from the webs of interlocation to which an individual originally was born. But even in those cases, Taylor argues that a stepping altogether outside the framework of interlocation is rather to be seen as a continuing conversation of an independent stance taken by the individual that in turn is defined by the tradition of the culture to which he or she originally belongs. So in this sense one can say that the operation of moral imagination is not to be understood as functioning in vacuum but is linked to the culture of the community to which he or she belongs.

Again, Ricoeur, in justifying the move from a world of narrative imagination to that of the world of ethics holds that the natural progression of a narrative is primarily aimed at an examined life. So every action even those that are imagined are subjected to questions of good or bad and falls under the rubric of judgment.²⁶ Primarily, narrative in anticipating actions that are complex and rich in the nature of ethical telling is able to serve as a guide, for an extension of the practical field beyond the sphere of simple actions. Therefore, the self in a narrative in response to the question “who is the author?” tells a story that reflects the ongoing process of self-constancy and self-rectification following poetic imagination. Now, the self of self-constancy in being qualified by a sense of moral imagination conducts himself or herself in a way that the others can count on him or her. In other words, knowing that the other is counting on him or her, the self holds himself or herself accountable for his or her actions.²⁷ Here, both the meanings of the term “counting on” and “being accountable for” is covered by the term responsibility that is attached to self-constancy. This enables the self to give a response “Here I am!” to the searching question “Where are You?” when it is asked by the other who needs us.

However, as it has been pointed out earlier in the previous chapter, the problem that remains to be solved is with the fact that the poetic resolution that is instrumental in bringing a structure of self-constancy can also be the factor that destabilizes narrative identity, as

²⁵ Ibid., 35

²⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 164

²⁷ Ibid., 165

imagination in itself knows no censure. However, here we cannot but agree with Ricoeur's response that this kind of ethical deliberation is not to be mistaken as exiting from one's sphere of identity rather it is to be understood as "liberation from one's private interest." The meaning of a capable subject thus reaches its highest designation under the concept of imputability. It is under this concept that the notion of responsibility turned towards the past implies that we assume a past act that affects us as our doing, without it being entirely our own work. It ushers in a sense of indebtedness for those actions which has made us what we are today. Viewed from a future perspective, it implies that someone assumes responsibility for those consequences that are not expressly foreseen and intended. Thus, Ricoeur is of the view that, "Imputability thus finds its other in the real or potential victims of a violent act."²⁸

3. An Observation

It is as Ricoeur has pointed out, narrative identity, in providing a common ground for the possible interplay of history and fiction, is always marked by a tension that results from the push and pull of these two factors. Indeed, the friction between the two forces is such that "narrative identity thus becomes the name of a problem at least as much as it is that of a solution."²⁹ However, as it can be seen in the act of reconfiguration that it is true to a certain extent that we in our narrative engagements use our imagination more than the will. We are constantly engaged in creation of the world of possibilities and at the same time have freedom to choose the best from these vast arrays of possibilities. All these actions, of creating and choosing, points back to the "who?" This is where one can see how the type of certainty that is demanded by the hermeneutics of the self, understood in terms of notion of attestation, seem to play a decisive role.

The response "Here I am!" is by which the self "recognizes himself or herself as the subject of imputation marks a halt in the wandering as the subject of imputation marks a halt in the wandering that may well result from the self's confrontation with a multitude of models for action and life, some of which go so far as to paralyze the capacity for firm action."³⁰ Here, it is

²⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition* trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) 108.

²⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol 3., trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 249.

³⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 167.

in between the vast array of possibilities thrown up by moral imagination and the choice made clear by self in the form of an attestation “Here is where I stand!”, which is reflective of his or her authentic voice, that we see a picture of the self emerging. Therefore, one can say, not with the kind of stoic pride but with the modesty of self-commitment, perhaps it is with the help of moral imagination and authenticity that a narrative in constructing an identity of our own is able to hold the self at distance, safe from falling into the folly of the two extremes of the exalted self and the humiliated self.

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