Issue: Whether the large-scale structure of human existence is narrative (diachronic) or non-narrative (episodic)

Galen Strawson’s view: “I have a past, like any human being, I have a respectable amount of factual knowledge about my past, and I also remember some of my past experiences “from the inside”, as philosophers say. And yet I have absolutely no sense of my life as a narrative with form, or indeed as a narrative without form. Absolutely none. Nor do I have any great or special interest in my past. Nor do I have a great deal of concern for my future.”

Narrativists (Diachronic)

• We story ourselves and we are our stories. Human beings typically experience their lives as a narrative or story, or at least as some sort of collection of stories.
• What it is to be a person (and so a self) on this view, is to experience one’s life through the lens of a background autobiographical narrative. As persons we experience the present not as an isolated moment, but as part of an ongoing life story.
• Self-narration is a good thing, necessary for a full human life.
• To be Narrative with a capital ‘N’ is to be naturally disposed to experience or conceive of one’s life, one’s existence in time, oneself, in a narrative way, as having the form of a story, or perhaps a collection of stories, and – in some manner – to live in and through this conception.
• Narrativists experience themselves as authoring their life stories, determining themselves through their stories.
• Persons experience their lives as unified wholes.
• Personal identity is the internalised and evolving life story that each of us is working on as we move through our adult lives... I... do not really know who I am until I have a good understanding of my narrative identity.
• The basic form of Diachronic self-experience is that one naturally figures oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future—something that has relatively long-term diachronic continuity, something that persists over a long stretch of time, perhaps for life.

Non-Narrativists (Episodics)

• The narrativists’ claim is false—these are not universal human truths.
• The deliverances of memory are, for us, hopelessly piecemeal and disordered, even when we’re trying to remember a temporally extended sequence of events.
• Life is just a ‘great shambles.’
• Thoughts are things that just happen.
• Non-narrativists simply don’t experience themselves as in control of their life stories, as “self-authoring” persons experience their lives as single finite biological individuals with a certain curriculum vitae (a list of accomplishments or activities).
• A‘autobiographical narrative’ does not play any significant role in how the non-narrativist experiences the world.
• ‘Each moment I feel as if I’ve just been born/Into an endlessly new world.’
• Events in my remoter past didn’t happen to me. It does not follow from the fact that I have memories of past experiences that I experience them as having happened to me.
• There is no narrative unity: various selves... make up our composite Self. There are constant and often shocklike transitions between these selves. My self... is a dramatic ensemble.
• Memory is hopelessly untrustworthy, and the fundamental lesson of self-knowledge is knowledge of self-ignorance.
• If one is Episodic one does not figure oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future, although one is perfectly well aware that one has long-term continuity considered as a whole human being. Episodics are likely to have no particular tendency to see their life in Narrative terms.