

Identity Problems for Narrative Selves

[⁷There are three objections to NCS which should be d

[On the narrative conception,] when I tell the story of how the cricket ball that hit me on the left fore-arm last Saturday 'bloody well hurt!' I am ascribing the pain in the forearm to a collection of narratives. This sounds wrong. I feel pain after being struck on the arm by a hard cricket ball propelled at me at 85 miles per hour. That is what the narrative is about, the narrative is about a subject who feels pain, and that subject who feels *is* me.¹⁰

For Menary, there has to be a prior embodied human self that the narrative is about in order for the narrative to be metaphysically feasible. However, Menary overstates the case. Although I agree that no proponent has fully worked out the deep ontological issues underlying NCS, there may be possible routes to do so. For example, on Amie Thomasson's account of the metaphysics of fictional characters, characters in narratives are actual but abstract entities, capable of feeling pain and living out lives that ordinary humans do.¹¹ Although Thomasson does not discuss NCS,

section is that the worry is not merely a skeptical worry. What I shall argue is not that that problem of providing identity conditions for characters in narratives is intractable, but rather that the most plausible solution to the problem undermines the point of having a narrative conception of the self.

There is an easy way to show that when a narrative says “The sun rose again today” in different chapters, it is about the same supposed object. The phrase “the sun” in a narrative gets its reference in a familiar Kripkean way – there is

dominant view is that fictional characters get their identity at least in part from the intentions of their creators,¹⁵ and this view seemingly ought to apply to narratives.

So it appears that for a narrative to be about a single individual, it is a necessary condition that there be intent by the author that the narrative be about a single individual. Now, I shall grant that in normal instances, authors, given the proper intention, may use the same term throughout a narrative, with the same intended meaning. I shall even grant that this holds true for names such as “Pegasus” which do not have a causal chain back to a baptism of an actual thing. So my view is not a skeptical worry about narratives.

Although above in §1

ever having met one, would have to intentionally create such a mystical being. But this is it quite unclear how this might happen.

§4. A revised NCS?

It might be claimed that I am asking too much of NCS. In particular, NCS may simply claim that as long as a narrative is about a single human being (and not necessarily a “coherent character”), that is enough to make the claim of minimal narrative identity for a self. In other words, the narrative need not assume that it is the story of a *self*, over and above being about a single human, in order for NCS to succeed. And since I grant that narratives may include stories of continuous objects like human beings which are no more problematic than narrative about the sun, then narratives can be about continuous humans. And so we may revise the minimal narrative identity claim to be:

we may simply assume that the human in the narrativ

which humans use self-narrative to understand themselves and the world. But philosophers, in claiming that selves may be created through such narratives (or, at least, that truth conditions for claims using the notion of a “self” are made true because of narratives, as in the minimal identity claim), are load narratives with a metaphysical problems which turns out to be as difficult as the problems which beset claims that there are genuine selves.

My first argument was that for there to be a coherent character or self in a text requires certain authorial intention, and it is implausible that a non-genuine-self author could have that proper intention. If we revise NCS to require only that the non-genuine-self author tell a story about a human being, this is not sufficient to do the work that NCS requires since we can still

character applies to our (real) selves who are telling and hearing these narratives. Regardless of whether or not this positive proposal can ultimately withstand critiques such as those from Hume, Parfit, and Gazzaniga, proponents of NCS who genuinely maintain that there are no real selves ought to give up on the idea that we can base claims of the self on claims of a coherent character in a narrative.

Bibliography

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