

THE TIME OF THE SELF

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Summary

How should one go about understanding the relation between time and self? In the following I will compare and contrast two philosophical conceptions of self that both stress the close connection between selfhood and temporality. Despite this shared conviction they happen to emphasize quite different aspects of self, however, partly because they operate with quite different notions of time. In the first case, the focus is on narrated time and on the link between selfhood and narration, in the second case, it is on the temporal structure of the stream of consciousness.

What is the relation between time and self? Well, one rather obvious and quite venerable suggestion is that the relation is first and foremost of a negative nature. Consider the claim that experiences never occur in isolation, and that the stream of consciousness is an ensemble of experiences that is unified both at and over time, both synchronically and diachronically. According to a classical view, we need to appeal to a self in order to account for this diachronic and synchronic unity. To think of a simultaneous or temporally dispersed plurality of experiences is to think of myself as being conscious of this plurality, and as the argument goes this requires an undivided, invariable, unchanging me. The self is a principle of identity. It is that which persists and resists temporal change. This is why it has even occasionally been ascribed a certain supratemporal or atemporal character. On such an account, the unity of self is taken to be something with explanatory power rather than something that itself is in need of an explanation.

There is, however, also a longstanding philosophical tradition for insisting on a very tight link between temporality and selfhood. One forceful articulation of such a view can be found in Heidegger. As he writes in the lecture course *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*: “Dasein [Heidegger’s terminus technicus for self] is intentional only because it is determined

essentially by temporality” (Heidegger 1982, 268). And again a little bit later “Dasein’s basic constitution is grounded originally in [...] temporality” (Heidegger 1982, 314).

In the following, I will offer some suggestions about how one might go about understanding the relation between time and self. More specifically, I will compare and contrast two philosophical conceptions of self that both stress the close connection between selfhood and temporality. Despite this shared conviction they happen to emphasize quite different aspects of self, however, partly because they operate with quite different notions of time. In the first case, the focus is on narrated time and on the link between selfhood and narration, in the second case, it is on the temporal structure of the stream of consciousness.

1. *Identity and self-constitution*

Let us consider thoughts that willy-nilly run through our heads, thoughts that strike us out of the blue, let us consider passions and desires that are felt, from the first-person perspective, as intrusive—as when somebody says that when he was possessed by anger, he was not in possession of himself—or let us take experiences that are induced in us through hypnosis or drugs, and then compare these cases with experiences, thoughts and desires that we welcome or accept at the time of their occurrence. As Frankfurt has argued, although the former class might indeed be conscious events that occur in us, although they are events in the history of a person’s mind, they are not that person’s desire, experience or thought (Frankfurt 1988, 59-61). According to Frankfurt, a person is not simply to be identified with whatever goes on in his mind. On the contrary, conscious states or episodes that we disapprove of when they occur are not ours in the full sense of the word (Frankfurt 1988, 63). To disapprove of or reject passions or desires means to withdraw or distance oneself from them. To accept passions or desires, to see them as having a natural place in one’s experience, means to identify with them (Frankfurt 1988, 68). Frankfurt concedes that it is difficult to articulate the notion of identification at stake in a satisfactory manner, but ultimately he suggests that when a person decides something without reservations,

the decision determines what the person really wants by making the desire on which he decides fully his own. To this extent the person, in making a decision by which he identifies with a desire, *constitutes himself*. The pertinent desire is

no longer in any way external to him. It is not a desire that he “has” merely as a subject in whose history it happens to occur, as a person may “have” an involuntary spasm that happens to occur in the history of his body. It comes to be a desire that is incorporated into him by virtue of the fact that he has it *by his own will* (Frankfurt 1988, 170).

Frankfurt’s basic point is consequently that the identification in question amounts to a specific form of ownership which is constitutive of self. Or rather, and importantly, arguably his emphasis is on *authorship* rather than mere *ownership*. This point tallies rather well with similar claims made by Korsgaard. In her recent book, *Self-constitution: Agency, Integrity and Identity*, Korsgaard has argued that human beings, qua rational beings, have a distinct form of identity, a norm-governed form of identity for which we are ourselves responsible (Korsgaard 2009, xii). Korsgaard claims that when I act in accordance with normative principles, when I allow them to govern my will, when I endorse, embrace and affirm them, I make them my own and thereby decide who to be (Korsgaard 2009, 43). The identity in question is consequently quite literally constituted by our choices and actions (Korsgaard 2009, 19). They define who we are. To act is to be engaged in a process of self-constitution. Korsgaard furthermore speaks of the process of self-constitution as involving the selection of certain social roles, and of fulfilling such roles with integrity and dedication. Moreover, it involves the task of integrating such roles into a single identity, into a coherent life (Korsgaard 2009, 25). For Korsgaard, this unification is accomplished through the process of practical deliberation (Korsgaard 2009, 126).

Korsgaard doesn’t address the issue of temporality in any detail, but it is not difficult to give a temporal twist to her view, especially if we consider the so-called narrative account of selfhood.

A central starting point for the latter approach is the assumption that we need to distinguish between merely being conscious or sentient, and being a self. The requirements that must be met in order to qualify for the latter are higher. More precisely, being a self is an achievement rather than a given. It is, if you will, more a question of an act than of a fact. How should we understand this? Consider that self-comprehension and self-knowledge is not something that is given once and for all, rather it is something that has to be acquired and which can be obtained with varying degrees of success. As long as life goes on, there is no final self-understanding. The same, however, can also be said for what it means to be a self. The self is not a thing, it is not something fixed and unchangeable

but rather, something evolving, something that is realized through one's projects. It is something that cannot be neatly separated from one's own self-understanding and self-interpretation. This is also why being a self is quite different from being slim, 44-years old or black-haired. When confronted with the question "Who am I?" we will typically tell a certain story, emphasizing certain aspects that we deem to be of special significance, to be that which constitutes the *leitmotif* in our life, to be that which defines who we are, that which we present to others for recognition and approval (Ricoeur 1985, 442f.). To answer the question "Who am I?" is to tell the story of a life (Ricoeur 1985, 442); a life story that tells where I am coming from and where I am heading.

Ricoeur has occasionally presented his own notion of narrative identity as a solution to the traditional dilemma of having to choose between the Cartesian notion of the self as a principle of identity that remains the same throughout the diversity of its different states and the positions of Hume and Nietzsche who hold an identical subject to be nothing but a substantialist illusion (Ricoeur 1985, 443). Ricoeur suggests that we can avoid this dilemma if we replace the notion of identity that they respectively defend and reject with the concept of narrative identity. The identity of the narrative self rests upon narrative configurations. Unlike the abstract identity of the same, the narrative identity can include changes and mutations within the cohesion of one lifetime. The story of a life continues to be refigured by all the truthful or fictive stories a subject tells about him- or herself. It is this constant reconfiguration that makes "life itself a cloth woven of stories told" (Ricoeur 1985, 443).

Any consideration of narrative identity obviously entails a reference to others, since there is a clear social dimension to the achievement of narrative self-understanding. Who one is depends on the values, ideals and goals one has; it is a question of what has significance and meaning for one, and this, of course, is conditioned by the community of which one is part. Thus, as has often been claimed, one cannot be a self on one's own, but only together with others. To come to know oneself is consequently both more complicated than knowing one's immediate beliefs and desires and less private than it might initially seem (Jopling 2000, 137). When I interpret myself in terms of a life story, I might be both the narrator and the main character, but I am not the sole author. The beginning of my own story has always already been made for me by others and the way the story unfolds is only in part determined by my own choices and decisions. In fact, the story of any individual life is not only interwoven with

the stories of others (parents, siblings, friends etc.), it is also embedded in a larger historical and communal meaning-giving structure. I learn what counts from others, and I thereby partake in a common tradition which stretches back through a chain of generations into a dim past.

As should have become clear by now, the narrative account quite explicitly emphasizes the importance of temporality. Indeed, as Ricoeur points out in his *Temps et récit* it is impossible to discuss the issues of selfhood and personal identity in abstraction from the temporal dimension of human existence (Ricoeur 1990, 138). But as he then adds, human time is neither the subjective time of consciousness, nor the objective time of the cosmos. Rather, human time bridges the gap between phenomenological and cosmological time. Human time is the time of our life stories. It is a narrated time, a time structured and articulated by the symbolic mediations of narratives (Ricoeur 1985, 439). Indeed, as Tomasello has recently argued, all cultures have narratives (creation myths, folk tales, decisive events) that help define their group as a coherent entity through time (Tomasello 2008, 283).

Consider more specifically the issue of long-term diachronic identity and persistency. According to the narrative approach we weave stories of our lives, we organize and unify our experiences and actions according to narrative structures, and the claim has been that this is what constitutes us as persisting selves. As MacIntyre writes, the unity of the self “resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end” (MacIntyre 1985, 205). What is it that allows us to conceive of ourselves as remaining identical through change? When having a self-constituting narrative, what happens to me is not interpreted as an isolated incident, but as part of an ongoing self-involving story. Whether or not a particular action, experience or characteristic counts as mine—in the emphatic sense of the term—is a question of whether or not it is included in my self-narrative (Schechtman 2006, 162). As Schechtman argues, in order to make past experiences ours, in order to affirm the identity of the past self and the present self, it is not sufficient to simply remember these past experiences from the first-person perspective. Rather we must identify with the temporally removed experience, we must care about and feel an affective connection to it. The more strongly we appropriate it, by weaving it into our narrative, the more fully or completely is it our own (Schechtman 2006, 171, 167, 174, 175). So again, the idea is that a narrative allows for a synthesis of the diverse and heterogeneous aspects of life. Events and experiences that occur at different times are united

by being incorporated into a single narrative. The narrative allows for a coordination of past, present and future, it establishes a web of semantic relations that allows us to link events across time into a meaningful whole (Atkins 2004, 347, 350).

How should we assess the narrative account? It very much targets what is specific to human self-identity and takes self-persistence as an achievement rather than as a given. It is something we can succeed in, but also something we can fail at. It is a constructed identity and one where historical and narrated time plays a significant role. Rather than seeing temporality as an obstacle or challenge to self-identity, it would be more correct to consider it as a crucial prerequisite.

In her recent defence of this approach, Schechtman has argued that narratives constitute the phenomenological unity of consciousness over time (2006, 167). Similar claims can be found in Atkins who highlights the fact that the narrative model gives a “central and irreducible role to the first-person perspective” (2004, 341). Atkins furthermore claims that the narrative model does justice to the importance that a person attaches to being the same experiential subject over time. It secures the continuation of one’s concrete first-person perspective (2004, 342). When faced with this kind of claim, it is striking, however, how much weight Atkins puts on the reflective stance. Indeed, she even explicitly defines the first-person perspective as a *reflective* structure of human consciousness. This is also a tendency we find in other advocates of a narrative account of self.

2. *Self, experience and temporality*

One critical question to ask is, of course, whether the narrative account—contrary to the claims made by Atkins—really does justice to the first-person character of our experiential life, or whether its focus on the self as a reflective construction ignores a necessary presupposition, namely a more basic pre-reflective experiential subjectivity? If this is so, which I happen to think, what is then the relation between a more experiential form of self and temporality?

To start with, what does the latter form of self amount to? Consider the following example. Imagine a situation where you first see a green frog

and then see a yellow banana. Then imagine that your visual perception of the yellow banana is succeeded by a recollection of the yellow banana. How should we describe the phenomenal complexity? One rather natural way to do so (which leaves out the fact and added complication that the whole scenario is played out in the imagination) is as follows: First, we have an intentional act of a specific type (a perception) which is directed at a specific object (a frog). Then we retain the intentional act-type (the perception), but replace the frog with another object (a banana). In a final step, we replace the perception with another act-type (a recollection) while retaining the second object. By going through these variations, we succeed in establishing that an investigation of our experiential life shouldn't merely focus on the various intentional objects we can be directed at, but that it also has to consider the different intentional types or attitudes we can adopt. This is all trivial. But then consider the following question. If we compare the initial situation where we perceived a green frog with the final situation where we recollected a yellow banana, there has been a change of both the object and the intentional type. Does such a change leave nothing unchanged in the experiential flow? Is the difference between the first experience and the last experience as radical as the difference between my current experience and the current experience of someone else? We should deny this. Whatever their type, whatever their object, there is something that the different experiences have in common. Not only is the first experience retained by the last experience, but the different experiences are all characterized by the same fundamental first-personal character.

Some might object that there is no property common to all my experiences, no stamp or label that clearly identifies them as mine. But this objection is misplaced in that it looks for the commonality in the wrong place. The for-me-ness or mineness in question is not a quality like scarlet, sour or soft. It doesn't refer to a specific experiential content, to a specific *what*, nor does it refer to the diachronic or synchronic sum of such content, or to some other relation that might obtain between the contents in question. Rather, it refers to the distinct givenness or *how* of experience. It refers to the first-personal presence of experience.

Whatever their character, whatever their object, all experiences are subjective in the sense that they feel like something *for somebody*. They are subjective in the sense that there is a distinctive way they present themselves to the subject or self whose episodes they are. It could consequently be claimed that anybody who denies the for-me-ness or mineness of experience simply fails to recognize an essential constitutive aspect of

experience. Such a denial would be tantamount to a denial of the first-person perspective. It would entail the view that my own mind is either not given to me at all—I would be mind- or self-blind—or present to me in exactly the same way as the minds of others.

To better pin down the specificity and phenomenological character of this proposal, let me distinguish it from another account. According to this alternative proposal, which has a long heritage, each and every experience presupposes by conceptual necessity a subject of experience, one the existence of which we can infer, but which is not itself in any way experientially given. A version of this view has recently been defended by Searle. According to Searle, the self is not a separate and distinct entity but rather a formal feature of the conscious field. He claims that we misdescribe the conscious field if we think of it as a field constituted only by its contents and their arrangements. The contents require a principle of unity, but that principle, namely the self, is not a separate thing or entity. Searle then goes on to say that the postulation of a self is like the postulation of a point of view in visual perception. Just like we cannot make sense of our perceptions unless we suppose that they occur from a point of view, even though the point of view is not itself perceived, we cannot, according to Searle, make sense of our conscious experiences unless we suppose that they occur to a self, even though the self is not consciously experienced. The self is not the object of consciousness, nor is it part of the content of consciousness, indeed we have on Searle's account no experience of the self at all, but since all (non-pathological) consciousness has to be possessed by a self, we can infer that it must exist (Searle 2005, 16-18). As I see it, the problem with this account is that Searle fails to realize that the experiential reality of the self is linked to the first-personal character or for-me-ness of experience. To be conscious of *oneself* is, consequently, not to capture a pure self that exists in separation from the stream of consciousness; rather, it is a question of enjoying first-personal access to one's own experiential life.

To sum up, on this view, the self is defined as the very subjectivity of experience and is not a separately existing entity (cf. Zahavi 2005, 2009, 2011). It doesn't exist independently of or in separation from the experiential flow. But what has this experiential self to do with temporality? On one interpretation, nothing, on another quite a lot. As for the former, consider a recent argument made by George Dreyfus in the context of a discussion of Buddhist no-self doctrines. According to Dreyfus, what is experientially present is an ever changing stream of consciousness. Interest-

ingly, and in opposition to some of the bundle theorists, Dreyfus denies that experiences are fundamentally impersonal, as if the attribution of first-personal character to our experiential life is a *post-hoc* fabrication. Rather, on his view, our experiences are from the very start intrinsically self-specified (Dreyfus 2011, 120). But although Dreyfus by implication is prepared to accept the reality of subjectivity, he insists that distortion arises the moment we interpret this subjectivity as a persisting self (Dreyfus 2011, 123). More specifically, whereas Dreyfus wants to retain synchronic unity, he denies diachronic unity. There is no temporally extended and persisting self (Dreyfus 2011, 131).

But is this position really viable? Consider the phenomenological claim that we all experience change and persistence. In his *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* Husserl asks how it is possible for us to be conscious of temporal objects, objects with a temporal extension. How is it possible to be conscious of objects such as melodies, which cannot appear all at once, but only unfold themselves over time? One of Husserl's main claims is that a perception of a temporally extended object as well as the perception of succession and change, would be impossible if perception provided us only with access to a momentary or pure now-slice of the object and if the stream of consciousness itself was a series of unconnected points of experiencing, like a line of pearls. If our perception were restricted to being conscious of that which exists right now, it would be impossible to *perceive* anything with temporal extension and duration, for a succession of momentary points of experience does not, as such, enable us to be conscious of succession and duration. (Just imagine that the points of experience occurred sequentially in different individuals). Since we do experience succession and duration, we must acknowledge that the successive phases of consciousness are somehow united experientially. But how does that happen? Some have suggested that imagination or memory might play a crucial role, and that these faculties allow us to transcend the punctual now. We perceive that which occurs right now, and remember that which is no longer and imagine that which has not yet occurred. But according to Husserl, we need to distinguish between directly experiencing change and duration and merely imagining or remembering it. In his view, we have an intuitive presentation of succession. To put it differently, Husserl would insist that there is a manifest phenomenological difference between seeing a movement (that necessarily extends in time) or hearing a melody, and remembering or imagining either.

Husserl's own alternative is to insist on the *width of presence*. Perceptual presence is not punctual, it is a field in which now, not-now and not-yet-now is given in a horizontal gestalt. This is what is required if perception of an enduring object is to be possible. According to Husserl, the basic unit of temporality is not a "knife-edge" present, but a "duration-block", i.e., a temporal field that comprises all three temporal modes of present, past, and future. Husserl employs three technical terms to describe the temporal structure of consciousness. There is (i) a 'primal impression' narrowly directed toward the strictly circumscribed now-slice of the object. The primal impression never appears in isolation and is an abstract component that by itself cannot provide us with a perception of a temporal object. The primal impression is accompanied by (ii) a 'retention', or retentional aspect, which provides us with a consciousness of the just-elapsing slice of the object thereby furnishing the primal impression with a past-directed temporal context, and by (iii) a 'protention', or protentional aspect, which in a more-or-less indefinite way intends the slice of the object about to occur thereby providing a future-oriented temporal context for the primal impression (Husserl 1962, 202). The concrete and full structure of all lived experience is consequently *protention-primal impression-retention*. Although the specific experiential contents of this structure change progressively from moment to moment, at any one given moment this threefold structure is present as a unified whole.

Husserl wasn't merely interested in the question of how we can be aware of objects with temporal extension, however, but also in how we can be aware of our own ongoing stream of experiences. To put it differently, Husserl's investigation is not only meant to explain how we can be aware of temporally extended units, but also how consciousness unifies itself across time. According to his model, however, the retention of, say, past notes of a melody is accomplished, not by a "real" or literal re-presentation of the notes (as if I were hearing them a second time and simultaneously with the current note), but by a retention of my just-past *experience* of the melody. In short, each actual phase of consciousness retains not only the just-past tones, but also the previous phase of consciousness. In short, the retentional process not only permits us to experience an enduring temporal object, it does not merely enable the constitution of the identity of an object in a manifold of temporal phases, it also provides us with non-observational, pre-reflective temporal self-consciousness:

The flow of the consciousness that constitutes immanent time not only *exists* but is so remarkably and yet intelligibly fashioned that a self-appearance of the flow necessarily exists in it, and therefore the flow itself must necessarily be apprehensible in the flowing. The self-appearance of the flow does not require a second flow; on the contrary, it constitutes itself as a phenomenon in itself. (Husserl 1966, 83)

The sense of ownership or mineness for the experience thus involves no reflective, second-order, metacognition. On the contrary, Husserl's account of the structure of inner time-consciousness (protention-primal impression-retention) is precisely to be understood as an analysis of the (micro)structure of first-personal givenness (cf. Zahavi 1999). How then would Husserl view the relation between self and time? Is the diachronic unity of consciousness explained through an appeal to some undivided, invariable, unchanging, trans-temporal entity? Not for Husserl. In his early work *Logical Investigations*, Husserl explicitly denied that the unity intrinsic to our experiential life was conditioned or guaranteed by any ego. Indeed, on his view whatever synthesizing contribution the ego could have made would be *superfluous* since the unification had already taken place in accordance with intra-experiential laws. To put it differently, on Husserl's early view, the stream of consciousness is self-unifying. In fact, since the ego, properly speaking, is the result of this unification, it couldn't be something that preceded or conditioned it (Husserl 1984, 364).¹

If we turn to Husserl's later lectures on time-consciousness, we will find the same view with no reference to the ego as the ultimate unifying or synthesizing agent. Rather, the unity is established or woven through the interplay between primal impression, retention and protention, i.e., through the structures of inner time-consciousness.

This is not the right place to delve into the intricacies of Husserl's complex account (see, however, Zahavi 2003, 2007), but for him, and this is really what I want to take from this, even the analysis of something as synchronic as a present experience would have to include a consideration of temporality, since every experience is a temporally extended lived presence. For the very same reason, we should reject Dreyfus's attempt to make a clear cut distinction between synchronic unity and diachronic unity. You cannot have synchronic unity without some amount of diachronic unity

1. A rather similar view can also be found in Sartre. In the essay *The transcendence of the ego*, Sartre asks whether the ego is a condition or rather an expression of unified consciousness? Sartre's own view is clear. On his account, consciousness is not in need of any transcendent principle of unification, since it is, as such, a flowing unity (Sartre 1936, 21ff.).

(if ever so short-lived). To claim otherwise is to miss the fundamental temporal character of consciousness.

3. *Dainton on time and self*

In his 2000 book, *Stream of Consciousness: Unity and Continuity in Conscious Experience*, Dainton defended a non-dualistic model of consciousness which he called the simple conception of experience (Dainton 2000, 57). According to this view, and in contrast to various higher-order representationalist accounts, experiential processes are intrinsically conscious and hence self-revealing or self-intimating. In order to understand the unity we find within experience we do consequently not have to look at anything above, beyond or external to experience itself. As Dainton puts it, consciousness does not consist of a stream running beneath a spot of light, nor of a spot of light running along a stream; consciousness is the stream itself, and the light extends through its entire length (Dainton 2000, 236f.).

In his 2008 book *The Phenomenal Self* Dainton proceeds to defend an experiential approach to self, and argues for a distinction between what he calls *psychological continuity*, which might involve persisting personality traits, beliefs, endorsed values etc. and *experiential continuity* (Dainton 2008, xii). Using various thought-experiments, Dainton argues that the two forms of continuity can be dissociated and suggests that a consideration of such cases shows experiential continuity to be the most important. One of the guiding intuitions he appeals to is the absurdity of the idea that an unbroken stream of consciousness might start off as yours and end up as somebody else's (Dainton 2008, 18). Likewise, he considers it absurd to suggest that your stream of consciousness can flow on in an ordinary straightforward manner but fail to take you with it (Dainton 2008, 26). Dainton consequently argues that the persistence of self is guaranteed by phenomenal or experiential continuity (Dainton 2008, 22).

Given this approach, Dainton is, however, faced with a problem, which he spends considerable effort (in fact most of his book) trying to solve, namely the so-called bridge-problem. Experiences in a single uninterrupted stream of consciousness may be linked by phenomenal continuity and belong to the same subject, but what about experiences in distinct streams (interrupted by gaps of unconsciousness)? On what experiential basis do we assign two streams that are separated by, say, dreamless sleep to a common owner (Dainton 2008, xx)? To put it differently, the bridge-

problem is not a problem for people favouring a brain based account, since causal and physical relations can span losses of consciousness. But it is very much a problem for people adopting an experience-based approach (Dainton 2008, 75).

Dainton's solution to the problem is to reject what he calls the *Essentially Conscious Self* (ECS) thesis, i.e., the thesis that a self is essentially a conscious entity, in favour of the *Potentially Conscious Self* (PCS) thesis, which claims that a self is an entity that is capable of being conscious. On the latter view, a self can lose consciousness and continue to exist provided it retains the capacity to be conscious.

Although, or perhaps precisely because, I have much sympathy for an experiential approach to the self, I have some qualms about this solution. One worry I have is that the PCS thesis simply departs too radically from the experiential approach. Consider that Dainton himself admits that PCS makes actual experience lose its central role (Dainton 2008, 112). He writes that the difference between being conscious and being unconscious is comparatively minor when seen from the perspective of PCS (Dainton 2008, 80), and that the persistence conditions of an unconscious subject must be the same as that of a conscious subject (Dainton 2008, 76). To put it differently, I fear that the solution proposed by Dainton ends up jettisoning the core insights of the experiential approach.

Moreover, I think the ECS thesis has some resources that Dainton fails to consider. On my own view, there is indeed no experiential self, no self as defined from the first-person perspective, when we are non-conscious. But this does not necessarily imply that the diachronic unity of self is threatened by alleged interruptions of the stream of consciousness (such as dreamless sleep, coma, etc.), since the unity of the experiential self is precisely defined in terms of first-personal character, rather than in terms of seamless temporal continuity. To put it differently, whether two temporally distinct experiences are mine or not is not a question of whether they are part of an uninterrupted stream of consciousness. Rather, experiences that I live through from the first-person perspective are by definition mine, regardless of their content and temporal location. I think this view is more in line with an experiential approach to self than the PCS thesis.² Still, some might object that this seems to confer some

2. Contrary to what Dainton is suggesting in his book (Dainton 2008, 243), this view doesn't commit me to the idea that all my experiences share a specific phenomenal quality. As already pointed out, the *for-me-ness* is not a quality like scarlet, sour or soft. It doesn't refer to a specific experiential content, to a specific *what*, but to a distinct *how*.

rather weird persistency conditions on selfhood. How can the experiential self pop in and out of existence in such a fashion? How can it so speak survive a period of non-existence? But perhaps this question is ill-posed. It assumes that the proper way to approach the question regarding diachronic self-identity is from a third-person perspective. From such a perspective, one can then view “the” stream of consciousness as consisting of a sequence of discrete episodes, occasionally interrupted by periods of unconsciousness. We would then be faced with the problem of how to establish links between these discrete episodes across the gaps of unconsciousness. But if we instead adopt a first-person perspective, which supposedly is the perspective an experienced-based approach should adopt, the situation looks rather differently. There are no extended periods of unconsciousness, and linking up with the experiences you had yesterday, say, an acute experience of shame or embarrassment, seems no different from linking up with the experiences you had earlier this morning. From the first-person perspective, it is hard to see why a consideration of the former example should motivate us to move from a focus on real experience to a focus on experiential powers and the capacity to produce experience.

But perhaps some would object that I am skirting the real issues. When remembering—from the first-person perspective—an episode that took place fifteen years ago, when remembering that past experience as mine, are we then confronted with a case where the experiential self has remained the same? Is the experiential self that originally lived through the experience 15 years ago, and the experiential self that today recalls the past experience, one and the same numerically identical self, or are we merely dealing with a relationship between two qualitatively similar selves, where the current self might stand, say, in a unique causal relationship to the former self? If one were to insist that the stream of consciousness is made up of a plurality of ontologically distinct (but qualitatively similar) short-term selves, one would inevitably be confronted with the question regarding their relationship. I don’t see any real alternative to the following proposal: their relationship is akin to the relationship between my self and the self of somebody else. And I find this proposal absurd. But even if similarity doesn’t amount to identity, surely—some might object—we need to distinguish an account claiming that the stream of consciousness involves some form of experiential continuity from an account claiming that it somehow involves diachronic identity. My response would however be to question the relevance and significance of that distinction in the present

context. To put it differently, in my view the continuity provided by the stream of consciousness, the unity provided by the same first-personal character, is sufficient for the kind of experiential self-identity that I am eager to preserve. If you find this insufficient, I think you are looking for the wrong kind of identity.

Having said this, let me add, that I don't think the notion of experiential self will allow us to solve all relevant questions regarding personal identity and persistence over time. In fact, I do think a consideration of unconsciousness and forgetfulness points to the limitations of what the notion of an experiential self can explain, and I think we need to consider the possibility that the duration of the experiential self might be less than the duration of a human life, just as we need to draw on different models of self. Take the case where we might wish to ascribe responsibility for past actions to an individual who no longer remembers them. By doing that we postulate an identity between the past offender and the present subject, but the identity in question is hardly one that can be accounted for in terms of the experiential self. To that extent, I would precisely favour a model of self that is ultimately more impure or hybrid than the one defended by Dainton (cf. Dainton 2008, 76).

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have been sketching two different approaches to self: A narrative, which highlights the importance of authorship, and an experiential, which puts more emphasis on ownership. As I already pointed out in my introduction, one of the interesting commonalities between both approaches is that they both emphasize the importance of time, though admittedly by operating with rather different conceptions of time. Moreover, they both argue that temporality rather than being an obstacle or challenge to the unity of self is essentially involved in it.

Do we need both accounts or can we make do with one of them? As should be clear by now, I consider an account of self which disregards the fundamental structures and features of our experiential life a non-starter. As I see it, a correct description and account of the experiential dimension must necessarily do justice to its first-personal character. None of the narrative theories that I am familiar with have, however, even come close to being able to explain how this first-personal character could be brought about by reflective appropriation and self-narration. However, and this

would be one of my main points, it is not enough to pay attention to the first-person perspective. Rather, the temporality of this perspective has to be investigated. We need an investigation of the temporality of lived presence. Ricoeur's work *Temps et récit* has occasionally been read as containing a fundamental criticism of Husserl's phenomenological investigation of time. But even if Ricoeur is right in pointing to the limitations of a phenomenological investigation of inner time-consciousness—there is more to the temporality of human existence than what is thought of in Husserl's investigations—this does not make Husserl's investigation superfluous. On the contrary, it remains pertinent for an understanding of the temporality of experiential life. Moreover, it describes a dimension of selfhood that is pretty much ignored by Ricoeur in his focus on narrative identity.

Although I take the experiential approach to be the more fundamental of the two, I would also claim that a consideration of some of those aspects that might be unique to human selfhood must draw on something like the narrative approach. I consequently think we need both accounts (and more still, cf. Zahavi 2010). We shouldn't accept the alternative between viewing selfhood as either a socially constructed achievement or as an innate and culturally invariant given. It is both.

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