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“Time Travels in Divers Guises with Divers Persons”

[1] Many hold that [i] all ordinary people experience their lives as a narrative or story of some sort (psychological Narrativity thesis). Many add that [ii] people ought to do this in order to live a good life (ethical Narrativity thesis). Both claims seem false. Many go on to claim something more specific: we not only experience our own lives as a narrative of some sort, [iii] we also ‘constitute our identity’ as a person or self in this way (narrative self-constitution thesis). Many add that [iv] we ought to constitute our identity in this way (ethical narrative self-constitution thesis). Again both claims seem false. Suppose Socrates is right that ‘the unexamined life is not a life for a human being’; suppose he’s right that self-examination is always a good thing. Even so, the narrative approach is not the only way to do it, nor the best way. **[2]** Is there any way of interpreting the four theses that shows them to have some plausibility? Perhaps there is—at least in the case of [i], but the price is high. It may be that we can confer some plausibility on [i], the psychological Narrativity thesis, only by understanding the term ‘narrative’ in such a way that the thesis turns into a platitude on a par with the platitudes that human beings think about past and future, plan actions, and act. **[3]** Furthermore: examination of the relevant philosophical and psychological literature suggests that once we leave the home domain of the term ‘narrative’ (literary theory), 95+ per cent of the supposedly theoretically distinctive and substantive uses of the term can be replaced without semantic loss by the use of other more neutral terms like ‘account’, ‘view’, ‘description’, ‘theory’, ‘explanation’.