

Narrativity, Aspect and Selfhood: Death as the Further Fact of Personal Identity

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1 Introduction

This paper defends several theses about the narrative theory of personal identity. My central thesis, which the others are intended to underwrite, is that narrativity constitutes the 'further fact' about personal identity. A second is that this further fact does not underlie continuous experiential states, but is something over and above them. This further fact unites dispersed moments of selfhood into a single self in the way that the curtain close unites the acts of a play into a single performance. Third, that this narrative self is an event rather than a substance. A model for understanding ourselves as events rather than substances can be found in the recent theory of action proposed by Michael Thompson. This model, I will show, is in fact a narrative model. The key to tying together these three notions—selfhood, action and narration—is found in an examination of the temporal form of aspect. It is my belief that inattention to the temporality of aspect has left many philosophers wrongly searching for the basis of a narrative theory of identity in the stories agents tell themselves (in self-authorship). Along the way, I will NOT be defending the following thesis, because I believe that it is wrong: that the narrative theory of identity is THE theory of personal identity. We have different ways of thinking about selves, and I am of the opinion that it is still an open question as to whether these different ways are reducible to one or commensurable at all. More to the point: I believe that there is a self that is independent of any narrative fact or narration.¹

The defense of these theses will be in part argumentative, and in part interpretive. Most of this account is found in Heidegger. But of course Heidegger is not easy to interpret, and none of the theses as I've expressed them can be found explicitly in Heidegger's texts as stated. Nonetheless, I believe that a careful reading of Heidegger's texts will vindicate this interpretation. More importantly, it is the right way to read him because he

¹It seems obvious to me that I could survive a total collapse of truth in the beliefs comprising my current, ongoing autobiography. In other words, I do not doubt that I could survive the discovery that I had been adopted, or that I am presently living in a Soviet simulation camp, or even that I am a simulant a la Nick Bostrom's Simulation Argument. If the question is bare survival, it is this self I worry about, rather than my narrative self.

discovers something true about these matters. To establish that this is the case, I enlist the help of Arthur Danto and Michael Thompson. It is Heidegger who gets the big picture right, but it is Thompson who helps to show how the foundation of this big picture is found in the minute aspectual structure of action. Danto, in turn, helps us to see that we may view the least significant actions as embodying a narrative structure so long as they exhibit an aspectual temporality. Thus it is Thompson who gets action right, and Danto who gets narration right, but it is Heidegger who brings action and narration together into a coherent theory of selfhood.

2 Self-Narrators

I'll define a narration as a verbalized or otherwise expressed story. Here is a brief example:

"Michael has just woken up. He is in the kitchen making coffee, but because he is still groggy, he has placed salt instead of sugar in his cup. When the coffee is finished steeping, he pours it into the mug with the salt and mixes in some milk. He takes a sip and, shocked by the disgusting taste, drops the mug onto the floor and it shatters. At least now he is fully awake."

Many philosophers say that a sense of self depends upon me telling myself some such story, of course replacing 'Michael' with suitable *de se* pronouns. Some philosophers want to go further still and argue that *without* any such story there is no 'me' at all. We might call such philosophers Narrative Idealists, and I'll call their theory the Narrative Thesis (**NT**). NT states that a story must be actually *told*, not merely available, if the self is to exist. The Narrative Fact Theory of Identity (NFT), by contrast, does not require that my story be told, only that the facts for such a story be available. NFT states that narrative facts constitute the further fact about me beyond any continuity of experiential states, and it is the thesis I shall be defending here.

A number of facts subtend this story: Michael awakes. Michael pours. Salt is in the mug and later the mug breaks. None of these by itself is a narrative fact. The narrative facts *make sense* of these facts. Michael is in the kitchen *in order to* make coffee. He places salt in the cup *in order to* sweeten the coffee and *because* he mistakenly believes that it is sugar. He drops the cup *because* it tastes awful. These 'in order to' and 'because' relations are the narrative facts, constituting kinds of relations that are neither strictly logical nor causal.² They are, moreover, practical or purposive facts. I will further argue, with the help of Heidegger and Thompson, that they are *not* practical or purposive in the sense of intentional or representational. It is part of Heidegger's story that there is a more fundamental sense to 'practical' and 'purposive' than that grounded in Dasein's mental life. Dasein's purposiveness is more than just Dasein's ability to put plans into action. I'll use Michael Thompson's recent work on action to help make this point.

²They are mereological relations, as we will see.

For an example of Narrative Idealism, here is a representative passage from Charles Taylor:

“[T]he claim is that our interpretation of ourselves and our experience is constitutive of what we are, and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on reality, separable from reality, nor as an epiphenomenon, which can be by-passed in our understanding of reality” (Taylor 1985, 47).

Like fear, or pain, Taylor argues that selves exist only in acts of narrative apprehension. Like a pain that is not felt, or a fear that is not sensed, a self that is not narrated is, in Taylor’s theory, a material contradiction. We find a similar idea, although not quite as explicit, in Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*, as when he writes that 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 2007, 205).

A common belief among advocates of NT is that human selves, being not only subjects but also the authors of their own stories, inherit some of the same freedom over their own lives that authors enjoy over their characters and worlds. We find this, for example, in Simone de Beauvoir’s explanation of why the writings of the Marquis de Sade are worth our attention:

“The fact is that it is neither as author nor as sexual pervert that Sade compels our attention: it is by virtue of the relationship which he created between these two aspects of himself. Sade’s aberrations begin to acquire value when, instead of enduring them as his fixed nature, he elaborates an immense system in order to justify them” (Beauvoir 2010, 3).

Self-authorship, according to Beauvoir, enables human selves to transform a “psychophysical destiny” into an “ethical choice.”³

Most NT advocates believe this is why human existence resists reduction to physical or natural descriptions. The contention is explicit in Taylor: Taylor believes that human life resists any ‘objective’ description (see Taylor 1985, 54 - 57). The salient feature about human life is the fact that things matter to us. We are not indifferent to the world around us; people, things, events have meaning or significance. This meaning cannot be, in Taylor’s term, ‘objectified.’ An “objective description” describes things according to their

³Beauvoir is clearly introducing a further normative dimension into the self as self-interpreter (NT) model. We cannot escape the need to write our own stories, and the stories each of us write for ourselves will be to varying degrees good or bad. Being a good self involves writing a good story, along some dimension of ‘good’: authentic, ethical, etc. We return to this theme below.

physical and causal properties. Of course humans can be described in physical and causal terms, but these descriptions will leave out the most salient features about us. Taylor argues that such descriptions can tell us how the world works but cannot tell us why anything matters. Yet it is only in matters that selves exist. In the essay from which I have already quoted, Taylor uses the example of shame to make his point. Shame, he argues, is not a simple feeling or affectation. Shame involves some understanding; one is only ever ashamed *of* something. Taylor imagines someone ashamed of a shrill voice. Nothing in the voice itself--no measure of its pitch or tone--will describe the meaning that the shrillness has for this person or why the shrillness matters. To understand that, one will have to understand that the shrillness of the voice is incompatible with the image of dignity that the person would like to project and embody. It is not any natural fact that makes shrillness and dignity incompatible; they are so only in the world inhabited by this person, and may not be incompatible in different systems of significance. Taylor argues that this significance must be interpreted narratively: "we cannot but strive to give our lives meaning or substance, and...this means that we understand ourselves inescapably in narrative" (Taylor 1985, 50) and again, "...as a being who grows and becomes I can only know myself through the history of my maturations and regressions, overcomings and defeats. My self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative." (Taylor 2006, 50)

In my view, Taylor too quickly accepts NT because he considers only two basic categories of beings: substances and self-interpreters. I suspect this is encouraged by how the substance versus self-interpreter dichotomy echoes and resembles other similar and trenchant dichotomies, such as between the subjective and objective, freedom and necessity, and consciousness and self-consciousness. A third kind of being is ignored by Taylor: events. Taylor is by no means alone in this. This seems to be a blind spot that characterizes both sides of the narrativity debates, between those who think that narrativity constitutes identity and those who do not. Perhaps even more strangely, given the importance of *Ereignis* to Heidegger's thinking, it is missing in the more focused debate over NT among Heidegger scholars. That is where we turn now.

3 Heidegger and the Narrative Controversy Revisited⁴

In order appreciate the significance of this lacunae in the discussion over the Narrativity Thesis I want to look briefly at a recent article by Tony Fisher on the narrativity debate among Heideggerians. Fisher argues that narrativity theories offer an important alternative to what he calls 'reidentification' theories of personal identity, and what I will call 'substance' models of selfhood . According to substance models of selfhood, the issue of personal identity involves discovering what conditions, if any, establish that a person at some later time is the same person who existed at an earlier time, or vice versa. The substance model, in others, frames persons as substances, and then seeks

⁴This section title intentionally repeats a section in Fisher's paper labelled "Heidegger and the Narrative Controversy."

out criteria by which one could answer the question, What makes personal substance X at t_1 identical to personal substance Y at t_2 .

The narrative approach to selfhood is supposed to be an alternative to the substance model. Fisher would like us to observe that it does not seem to matter, given how the issue is framed in the substance model, *who* is asking the question. The narrative approach, by contrast, is not indifferent to who is asking the question. The question of personal identity is only ever really asked, as a question that matters, by myself about myself. The question is not, what is it for some person X at t_1 to be the same as another person at t_2 , but what is it for *me* to be same person one year from now that I am today? It is, according to Fisher, a sufficient critique of the substance model that it fails to account for why the issue of personal identity matters in this way. Endorsing an argument he finds in the work of Marya Schectman, Fisher thinks that the question of selfhood could matter only if it is able to account for the first-person or 'experiential' dimension of being a self.⁵

"Adopting a third-personal and metaphysical approach, not only are reidentification theorists simply unable to answer to our best commonsense intuitions about what it is to be a self...they all miss the crucial link any theory *must* establish between our *practical interests* and the *role* such interests play in the constitution of the identity of persons" (Fisher 2010, 244).

Fisher's essay goes on to examine whether the Narrativity Thesis is the only way to understand the connection between the constitution of one's personal identity and one's practical interests. He concludes that it is not. Elements of our daily life, he argues, are narratable, but for the most part *not* caught up in a narrative that we tell ourselves about our life as a whole. This, he believes, is the most support one can get from Heidegger for NT.

The thesis in question is whether it is true that the only theory able to explain adequately the connection between our practical interests and the constitution of our identity is NT. An affirmative answer to this question says that "to be a self, a person, a 'who,' *requires* that one has a Narrative self-conception." Fisher calls this the "Narrativity Requirement" (NR). NR is clearly a version of NT. To be a self is to be a self-narrator. Upon this Fisher finds a second, normative requirement, which he calls the "Normative Stipulation" (NS): "in order to preserve the autonomy of the self, one ought to make one's narrative self-conception fully explicit for oneself." NR and NS together present the following picture of

⁵I do not endorse Fisher's claims here, and frankly, do not fully understand them. Parfit--a re-identification theorist *par excellence*, according to Fisher--says nothing incompatible with a first person view of the self, and is obviously *very focused* on answering 'what matters.' Barry Dainton, to offer another example, also develops a theory that is unambiguously a 'reidentification' theory in Fisher's sense yet explicitly 'experiential,' also in Fisher's sense (see Dainton 2006).

personal identity: selves exist as the subjects of stories that these same selves tell about themselves. To *be* a self at all is to tell a story *about* oneself. Control over oneself is therefore a function of exercising control over one's narrative, and for that, one must be aware of oneself as a narrative. The more control over one's story one has, the more autonomous one is, and the necessary first step for that autonomy is to recognize that one is this story.

NR will entail NS on a certain reading of Heidegger. According to this reading, Dasein's narrativity is latent in the temporal structure of Dasein's existence. One important difference between Dasein's temporality and the time at issue in the substance model is that for Dasein time matters. Dasein is not only in time, but *understands* itself fundamentally through time and takes itself *to be* temporal. Dasein projects itself into a future, and in so doing opens certain future possibilities while foreclosing others. Dasein is not merely in time but exists through time or, as Heidegger sometimes puts it, *self-temporalizes*. Dasein's possibilities are projected from out of its past. Dasein just is this projection of the past onto the future, which is why Heidegger sometimes likes to say that Dasein's past comes to it from out of its future (**citation**). Dasein constitutes itself by projecting itself onto future possibilities and this projection is essentially practical. It is thus that the constitution of Dasein's identity and Dasein's practical interests are one and the same. The evidence that this projection is to be understood narratively comes from the fact that in projecting itself, Dasein understands itself as undertaking actions in order to...., or because of.....and these relations of significance are precisely the kind of relations that constitute narratives. Additionally, in projecting itself onto certain possibilities instead of others, Dasein is striving to achieve self-constancy. "Self constancy is a way of Being of Dasein" (Heidegger 1996, 357). This is how NR entails NS according to the Narrativist reading of Heidegger. In choosing its future Dasein is choosing itself, deciding who it will be, and therein the central concepts of Division II of *Being and Time* make sense: resolution, authenticity, guilt, being towards death--these name the normative standards according to which Dasein's self-authorship are to be assessed, and through which they are active. Dasein achieves self-constancy through resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*), and this resoluteness, by establishing a continuity and constancy to one's life, ensures that the different moments of one's life have meaning or significance in terms of the other moments. (For example, I went to college in order to get a degree and now I have job that allows me to comfortably raise a family made possible by that degree and I am striving for a future in which I can look back on my life with pride in my work and family. In this story, the past *matters*—going to college *makes sense* and *made possible* my life as a father raising a family. Likewise, the present matters insofar as it anticipates and enables the future towards which I am moving and which will give this present moment, when past, its ultimate meaning.) On this reading, resoluteness is Dasein's ability to "pull itself together from the *dispersion* and the *disconnectedness* of what has 'just happened,'...[resulting in] the existentiell constancy which...has already anticipated every possible Moment arising from it" (Heidegger 2000, 356-357). This resoluteness, so the interpretation of Heidegger according to NT, is best understood as a *narrative resolution* (see Fisher 2010, 247). Finally, the success

and constancy of that resolution determines the degree of my authenticity, but of course, in striving for this authenticity, I necessarily close off certain possibilities for myself (I will never become a concert pianist), a necessity which is entailed by Dasein's finitude as death. Thus does the NT reading of Heidegger make sense of these key concepts: death and finitude. If life did not take time, and time were not an issue for Dasein, then no possibilities would be fundamentally foreclosed, and Dasein might never thereby embody guilt. But that is not Dasein's fate.

This reading of Heidegger can find substantial support in his writings, especially from the late twenties including *Being and Time*. But there are equally compelling reasons to reject it. While Heidegger emphasizes Dasein's self-projection and drive for self-constancy, he equally stresses that Dasein is never equal to the roles it projects for itself and that Dasein is characterized by an essential incompleteness, undecidability and nothingness. The anti-NT bases itself off of passages such as the following in *Being and Time*: "There belongs to Dasein, as long as it is, a 'not yet' which it will be." (Heidegger 1996, 296). Fisher dubs the anti-NT interpretation which emphasizes Dasein's incompleteness as--adopting a phrase from William Blattner--the "unattainability thesis." It is expressed in the recognition that no specific project will ever fulfill or complete the meaning of my life (see Blattner 1996). In other words, if we are nothing other than the stories we project ourselves into, these stories can never be completed and we are never wholly a self.

Blattner in particular develops an interpretation of Dasein that promotes a strong case on behalf of the anti-narrativist strain. His primary argument is as follows: if Dasein's fulfillment is Dasein's death, and if death is the foreclosure or end of all of its possibilities, then Dasein cannot both be and be fulfilled. So if fulfillment is understood in narrative terms, then Dasein cannot *be* the story that it tells itself, cannot be its own author. Blattner rests this interpretation upon passages like the one just above and ones like these (see Blattner 2007):

"'Future' does not here mean a Now, which *not yet* having become 'actual' sometime *will be*, but rather the coming in which Dasein comes toward itself in its ownmost ability to be" (Heidegger 1996, 299)

"Temporalizing does not mean a 'succession' of the ecstasies. The future is *not later* than beenness, and this is not *earlier* than the present." (Heidegger 1996, 321).

Blattner correctly notes that Dasein's possibilities, in Heidegger's sense, are the sort that *cannot* be actualities. Dasein cannot, in the present, whenever that is, attain its possibilities. To do so results in Dasein's death. Charles Guignon agrees with this interpretation. Both interpret the concept *Seinkoennen* as 'ability to be,' and argue that these possibilities that cannot be actualized, for to do so would be death. According to Blattner and Guignon, to interpret death narratively (according to NT) is to interpret it as the end of a life, as the *terminus ad quem* of a story (see Guignon 2008, 284). But this,

they argue, is clearly not what Heidegger has in mind. Death is rather “a certain condition in which one can find oneself, the condition of not being able to anyone in particular” (Blattner 1996, 108). The narrative interpretation, in other words, misconstrues the existentials.

Out of these conflicting interpretations Fisher seeks to weave something more accommodating. He agrees with the latter interpretation that to claim that Dasein exists as self-projection is not equivalent to endorsing NR or NS. Fisher argues that Heidegger explicitly rejects that option when he writes that “[p]rojecting has nothing to do with comporting towards a plan that has been thought out,” which is exactly the idea that the pro-narrativist reading seems to endorse. When Heidegger exhorts Dasein to “become who you are,” this is not intended to mean that Dasein should strive to become its narrative self-conception (see Fisher 2010, 252). At the same time, Fisher agrees with the pro-narrativists that human selves are in kind different from any thing else, and that this difference lies in the fact that human selves are self-interpreters. Only, as Fisher goes on to stress, “it is far from clear that existing as a self-interpreter needs to involve anything like the sense of wholeness that the Narrativity Thesis imposes, through NR and NS” (Fisher 2010, 252). Fisher concludes that Dasein is a self-interpreter but not a self-narration. Dasein is a self-interpreter in that Dasein has to make sense of what it is doing at any given moment, but this ‘making sense’ need not be, and usually is not, narrative in nature. It is much more menial (for example: I need no story, when cooking, to understand that I put in oil in order to sauté the garlic and that I am cooking in order to eat). More importantly, drawing on Galen Strawson’s distinction between episodic and diachronic selves, Fisher argues that Dasein does not require, and is under no obligation to construct, a narrative that ties together moments of Dasein’s life into a *whole life*. Dasein is capable, in Fisher’s model, of narrative self-projection (he says that Dasein’s existence is ‘narratable’) but that narrative self-projection is neither necessary nor an essential existential of Dasein’s being.

4 Time and Aspect

For the rest of the paper I will defend the following claims: Fisher, along with nearly everyone else engaged in this debate, neglects the Narrative Fact Theory I introduced at the start of this paper. He does so because he, like most of those engaged in the Heidegger and narrativity debate, ignores an event model of selfhood. I will argue on behalf of NFT through an analysis of Heidegger’s discussion of the temporality of Dasein. The mistake made by nearly everyone who addresses Dasein’s temporality is a failure to see that the concept of temporality Heidegger has in mind is best captured by an analysis of aspect. Aspect is the sort of temporality that characterizes events, and because of a general failure to examine the aspectual structure of temporality commentators have been neglecting or misinterpreting the event-like status of Dasein. Finally, we will see that events which exhibit a particular sort of aspectual temporality--performance or achievement events--fully satisfy a plausible theory of narrativity.

Aristotle is generally given credit for being the first to pay attention to the distinctive function of aspect in language. He noticed that a special class of verbs express actions or events that are resultative, while others do not. The former, Aristotle says, are characterized by movement (kinesis), while the latter are either actualities (energeia) or states. Most of us know that Aristotle does not mean only local motion or change of place by kinesis, but that is not enough. The kind of change kinesis denotes is what might be described as an *internal* change, change internal to the phenomenon expressed. It is event change. Objects may undergo movement or kinesis, but only as events (for example, the apple changes in the event of ripening). Second, not *all* events have kinesis or movement. Winning a race is an event, but it does not have kinesis. Walking, for reasons we'll see in moment, also does not have kinesis, for it is an activity (energeia). Hammering, fiddling, swimming, raining, collapsing--these are all events and involve motion, but none of these has movement in Aristotle's sense.

This distinction--between the kinds of events that have movement (kinesis) and those that do not--is a distinction of aspect. Aspect is distinct from tense. In fact, it is a different sense of time altogether (although they are related in important ways⁶). Tense serves to mark *when* an event occurred relative to the time of speech and within the frame of reference of time as measured by clocks. Thus, when I say that 'Suzy ate the fly,' I confirm that Suzy's eating the fly occurred before or prior to my speaking. If I say 'Suzy will eat the fly,' I let the speaker know that Suzy's fly eating will occur at a time after or later than my speech act. Aspect, on the other hand, refers to the temporal shape of an event, and reflects one's viewpoint on that event (hence the term: 'aspect'). Importantly, aspect is independent of tense insofar as the temporal shape of an event is true of that event regardless of *when* it occurs. Linguists--in a way that is not irrelevant to Heidegger's purposes--call terms that designate aspectual shape *Aktionsarte*, or 'action classes.' This is because aspect can only refer to event- or action-phenomena, not states. English recognizes aspect primarily with the perfect and imperfect formations: 'Suzy was walking to the festival' or 'Suzy had walked there last November.' There is also the present progressive: 'Suzy is building a house' or 'Suzy is jogging.' There is no perfect, imperfect or progressive formations of static verbs. Suzy can know, but she cannot be knowing. Suzy can conquer her fear, but she cannot have been fearing. There is no continuousness involved in states, even though one can be in a state for a continuous period of time. Events and actions, on the other hand, do not just exist,

⁶For another study. I will note the following: when we try to add time to a temporal expression, we end up with something that, if not quite unintelligible, is certainly awkward, eg., I built the house for an hour, or hung the curtains for a minute. The reason these expressions are awkward is that there is an intrinsic temporality already referenced, and forcing 'for an hour' or 'for a minute' is to impose an order of time upon the event that is somehow incidental to the event itself, even though of course house building and curtain hanging are activities that take place over minutes, hours and days. A useful analogy, suggested by Pinker (2007), is that aspect is independent of time in the way that shape is independent of space.

obtain or occur *at* times; they are themselves intrinsically temporal, albeit in different ways. Aspect is that linguistic convention that allows us to express those different ways. For example, some events are what linguists call activities and are characterized by what Aristotle termed 'energeia'. Walking is an activity, and therefore an energeia. To walk is to do something that in itself occurs over time regardless of when that time is. Pleasure is also an energeia, according to Aristotle (see Aristotle 1947, 524)⁷. Events take time. I need time in order to walk, but not in order to know or to understand (though I need time to learn). Activities exhibit *durative* aspect, and they can be specified by the following logical form:

When ϕ ing, and when ϕ is an activity verb, then if I am ϕ ing it follows that I ϕ 'd.

If I am walking, however briefly, then it follows that I have walked. Durative however is not the only aspectual formation.

For my purposes, the most important aspectual formation to discuss is a class of verbs sometimes called performances, sometimes accomplishments, sometimes something else. Performance verbs are ones that exhibit movement or kinesis instead of energeia. If I am building a house, then the house is in the state of kinesis prior to its completion. An acorn is in movement while it is growing into a tree. Some performances or accomplishments are what linguists call punctual. They happen all at once, like winning a game, or finishing the crossword puzzle. These are events, but their temporality, so to speak, is instantaneous (or 'momentaneous')⁸. Other kinds of events or actions have iterative aspect, like hammering a nail, or pounding the pavement, or the clock's ticking. Most important of all--at least for relating this discussion back to Heidegger--is a special class of performances that take place over time and exhibit potentiality or dynamis. Linguistics say that expressions of this latter sort have *telic* aspect. The acorn growing into a tree is like this. While growing, an acorn is potentially a tree, but not yet. So is building a house. While building, the house exists in a state of potentiality; it is *on its way* to being a house, but is not a house yet. Similarly, if I am cooking dinner, the ingredients

⁷ "What pleasure is, or what kind of thing it is, will become plainer if we take up the question again from the beginning. Seeing seems to be at any moment complete, for it does not lack anything which coming into being later will complete its form; and pleasure also seems to be of this nature. For it is a whole, and at no time can one find a pleasure whose form will be completed if the pleasure lasts longer. For this reason, too, it is not a movement. For every movement (e.g. that of building) takes time and is for the sake of an end, and is complete when it has made what it aims at. It is complete, therefore, only in the whole time or at that final moment. In their parts and during the time they occupy, all movements are incomplete, and are different in kind from the whole movement and from each other. For the fitting together of the stones is different from the fluting of the column, and these are both different from the making of the temple; and the making of the temple is complete (for it lacks nothing with a view to the end proposed), but the making of the base or of the triglyph is incomplete; for each is the making of only a part. They differ in kind, then, and it is not possible to find at any and every time a movement complete in form, but if at all, only in the whole time." (*Nichomachean Ethics*, 1174 a 14-30).

⁸See Pinker 2007.

are on their way to being a meal for my wife and I, but not yet. In general, verbs of performance aspect exhibit the following logical form:

When ψ ing, and ψ is a performance verb, then if I am ψ ing, I have not ψ 'd.

' ψ ing' in this case is in imperfect aspect. Again, to emphasize a feature that will be important to remember when we return to Heidegger, I cannot have ψ 'd in the present, I can only be ψ ing. I cannot now built the house, for if the house is built, then the event of its being built is necessarily in the past. The sentence grates against the ears of an English speaker because it is countensensical. *Dynamis kata kinesis*, as Heidegger elaborates at length in a lecture course in 1931 on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, is a special sort of potentiality. If I am sitting I am potentially standing (static verb). Likewise if I am walking I am potentially running, or if I am driving I am potentially walking. But walking is not on its way to running, just as sitting is not on its way to standing. On the other hand, the growing acorn is on its way to being a tree, the house I am building is on its way to being built, and the meal I am cooking is on its way to being cooked. So here we can speak of an *actual* potentiality, as it were. The potentiality is not just there in the abstract, as a mere logical or physical possibility. The potentiality is, so to speak, real.

5 Aspect, Action and Dasein

The *ordo cognoscendi* of *Being and Time* might be put as follows: Dasein begins with questioning the meaning of being, but comes to learn that its questioning of being in general is really the question of the meaning of Dasein's own being. Following this discovery, which results in the disclosure of being as Care, Dasein then (in Division II) comes to learn that the structure of care, and thus its own being, is temporal. Dasein's being is time. My suggestion is that we interpret this realization--that the being of Dasein is temporality--through the concept of eventhood and aspect. Dasein is *dynamis kata kinesis*⁹. *Dynamis kata kinesis* is a special sort of *dynamis*, as just discussed in the previous section. As *dynamis kata kinesis*, Dasein's 'possibilities' or 'potentialities' are of a specific sort. Heidegger puts it this way:

"Possibility, which Dasein in each case is existentially, is distinguished just as much from empty, logical possibility as from the contingency of something occurrent. As a modal category of being-occurrent, possibility means the *not yet* actual and the *not ever* necessary. It characterizes the *merely* possible...Possibility as an existentiale, on the other hand, is the most originary and last, positive, ontological determination of Dasein" (Heidegger 1996, 135)

The discussion of aspect the previous section helps us to make clear sense out of this and similarly-worded passages in *Being and Time*, and elsewhere. For we can now interpret this 'not yet' of which, as we saw, the anti-narrativists make so much. Blattner

⁹ See Heidegger 1995.

and Guignon, for example, interpret this 'not yet' as death and claim that this nullifies the NT reading of Heidegger. They understand, negatively, that death is not an event that happens to one at the end of one's life, but the positive interpretation they offer is, in my opinion, more complicated than it need be. Both conclude that death must be a kind of self-understanding of Dasein, a kind of experience or form of experience. This is because, having understood that Dasein is not occurrent and death is not event waiting at to happen to Dasein at the end of its life, they can think of no other way to conceive of it than as a sort of self-interpretation. This is because, as I have stressed, they, like most interpreters of Heidegger, ignore the possibility that Dasein is best understood as an event in the aspectual sense. We are now in a position to interpret Dasein's 'not yet' as dynamis kata kinesis, as a *real* potentiality on its way to completion in the sense that is true of all events described with telic aspect.

Let's consider this from the ground up, so to speak. Suppose that I am building a shed. I have laid the foundation and am now preparing the frame. I am hammering a nail into a two-by-four. "What are you doing?" you ask me. "Hammering a strut together," I answer. "Why?" you continue. "I'm hammering the strut to support the frame." There are other possible answers I might have given. I could have truthfully replied, "constructing a frame" or, more broadly, "building a shed," or even more broadly still, "getting my life in better order." Michael Thompson, in *Life and Action*, argues that the sort of exchange recorded here is the most basic form of intelligibility for actions. Thompson's primary thesis is that actions are rationalized at first and for the most part *not* by mental states such as intending, wanting or wishing, but by further actions. We do not in the first place make sense of some human behavior by positing a mental state as causing that behavior; rather we make sense of it by placing it within a larger context of action. I am hammering the two-by-four *in order to* finish a strut. I am finishing the strut *in order to* complete the frame. I am completing the frame *because* I am building and shed, and I am building a shed, finally, because I am trying to get my life in better order. Each subordinate clause on the right hand side of these sentences *makes sense of* the action described on the left hand side. In other words, according to Thompson, an action, such as "I am doing A," is made intelligible *by another action*, "because I am doing B."¹⁰

Recall now the logical form of verbs of telic aspect--verbs expressing dynamis kata kinesis:

When ψ ing, and ψ is a performance verb, then if I am ψ ing, I have not ψ 'd.

This has important implications for time. A telic verb in the present can *only* have imperfect aspect. We noted this earlier, but it bears repeating. Agents are doers, but no deed is ever *done* in the present. (Again, this, to my mind at any rate, makes much better sense of Dasein's 'not yet' status than what Guignon and Blattner suggest). This means that the answer to what any agent is doing at any given moment cannot consist

¹⁰More on Thompson.

of facts available at that same moment--be they facts 'on the ground' or facts about the agent's mental states (intending, wanting, etc.). Any given action only makes sense within a context that unfolds from out of the past and coming from a future. Thompson puts matters so: "the type of explanation of *action* at stake in action theory, whether naive or sophisticated, is uniformly a matter of locating the action explained in what might be called a developing process" (Thompson 2008, p132). Thompson calls this type of explanation "explanation by the imperfective" and claims that it is the basis of all intelligible action.¹¹

Whether or not Thompson it is correct that 'naive action theory' (his term for this theory) is a key missing ingredient to contemporary philosophy of action, I think it can be persuasively argued that something like this analysis of agency is at work for Heidegger. In fact, I want to offer a brief interpretation of Heidegger's analysis of the temporal structure of Dasein in terms of aspect in a way that builds off of Thompson's work on action.

One of Heidegger's key concepts for interpreting time is *ekstasis*. Dasein's temporality is characterized by three "ekstases," each corresponding to the retention/primal impression/protection model of temporal consciousness developed by Heidegger's mentor, Edmund Husserl. "Thus we call the phenomena of future, having-been, and present, the *ecstasies* of temporality" (Heidegger 1996, 302). Heidegger, like Husserl, was keen to emphasize that the time involved in the temporality of Dasein is not a time of indifferent moments. Like Husserl, he argues that the past is not a moment cut off from the present, nor the future something merely lying ahead. Instead, the past (having been) and future (expectancy) are structural parts of the living present--or, in more appropriate terms, structural parts of being-there, Da-sein. Unlike Husserl, however, he believes that this unity of temporality is not a function of Dasein's consciousness, but is the fundamental fact of Dasein's being. Dasein *is* the unity of the ekstases of temporality. But if the three ekstases constitute the unity of time, they also embody disruption and a lack of unity. Dasein's ekstastic being is the source, Heidegger claims, of Dasein's transcendence.¹² Above all, Dasein is characterized by a *self*-transcendence toward the future. "The primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future" (Heidegger 1996, 303). Time comes to Dasein, as it were, from the future, and this means that Dasein's being is characterized by a fundamental 'not yet': "As long as Dasein is, a not-yet belongs to it, which it will be" (Heidegger 1996, 225). Finally, futurity for Heidegger does not point to an infinite horizon. The future, like time itself, is finite. The finitude of time is just another name for death.

¹¹Need to explain what we do with activities.

¹²This also has a structural analogue in Husserl. Although he does not use the term in *Being and Time*, the lectures Heidegger composed around the time that *Being and Time* was published (late 1920's) make clear that he is working through his own version of a structural analysis of intentionality. Husserl finds intentionality based in consciousness, but Heidegger thinks that its source lies in Dasein's agency.

This is an all too brief recapitulation the major features of temporality, but it is easy to see that making sense of these features is no easy task. We already saw the consequences that result when interpreters wish to emphasize this or that feature of Dasein's temporality over others. In the dispute over the Narrativity Thesis, proponents of the thesis stress the unity of time in Heidegger's analysis, while opponents have stressed the opposite, the disunity of the ekstases. But I think that we can shed some light on these and other apparent inconsistencies in the account by returning to the analysis of aspect and action.

Aspect, as we saw in section four, is a sort of temporality distinct from tense. Aspect refers to the internal temporal shape of events. We have also briefly seen how Michael Thompson uses the concept of aspect to analyze action--events in the human mode. A central claim in Thompson's analysis is that present actions are always of imperfect aspect and thereby are part of broader or more encompassing projects.¹³ We can now put these two features together and recognize that the unifying, intelligible, aspectual structure that Thompson finds in action is precisely the same sort of unity and intelligibility that Heidegger finds in Dasein's temporality. This should come as no surprise. Heidegger repeatedly emphasizes that Dasein is no occurrent or present being. Dasein happens. This is just another way of saying that Dasein is an event.

I'll return to our example: I am nailing the strut. You ask me what I am doing. "Building a shed," I reply. Is this a true statement? Suppose that you have come to ask me to join you for lunch, and I accept. Now further suppose that during lunch a tornado sweeps across town destroying everything on my property. I move away and never finish the shed. If that is the case, then in fact it was not true that I was building a shed. It is true that I was *intending* to build a shed, or *trying* to build a shed, but since the shed was never built, it is no longer true that I was building a shed. If that example is not convincing, consider another: A man falls down in front of me from an apparent heart attack. I administer CPR. An ambulance arrives and the medical assistant asks me what I am doing. "Saving this man's life," I reply. Later it turns out that the man suffered a stroke, and my treatment was a proximal cause of his death. In fact, I was killing him. In this example, my earlier statement, "I am saving this man's life," turns out to have been false. It will be true that I was *trying* to save the man's life, and *intended* to save the man's life, but *in fact*, I killed him.

If Dasein is what Dasein does, then Dasein, like building a shed or saving a man's life, is *not* until the action is complete. I can, in the present moment, try to save a man, but I will

¹³To again mention a connection with Husserl: an analysis of action or Dasein in terms of aspect makes very clear the part/whole structure. The relation of 'moments' in aspectual time to the entire event is the relation of part to whole. Heidegger's talk of the wholeness of Dasein is clearly a carry over from his familiarity with Husserl, even if unacknowledged in *Being and Time*.

not *be* a savior until it is true, in the future, that the man has been saved. I believe this is the proper way of understanding Dasein's futurity. At the moment I am administering CPR, I am either a savior or a killer. Being *either* a savior or a killer, I am *at this moment* neither.¹⁴ Time will tell. And when it has--when, in the future, the man lives or dies--*then* it will be true that I *was* a savior, or that I *was* a killer. I *exist*, in other words, only ever in the future perfect, as what I *will have been*. I become what I am.

This aspectual interpretation of Dasein's temporality allows us to make sense of the major feature that Heidegger identifies: time is ekstastic in the aforementioned threefold manner insofar as it reflects the moments of any action. The aspectual view entails that there is never a 'starting' or first moment in any action. Bear with me on the following illustration:

In order to build a shed I am constructing a frame. In order to construct the frame I am putting together a strut. In order to put together the strut I am hammering a nail. In order to hammer the nail I am raising my arm. In order to raise my arm I am flexing my shoulder muscle. In order to flex my shoulder muscle I am exciting my spinal cord.....

The example is misinterpreted if it is understood causally. These are all things I am doing *at the same time*.¹⁵ To use a metaphor for a moment, what 'in order to' is in question depends upon how far the speaker zooms in or zooms out of the activity in question. But no matter how close or how far out the speaker zooms, it will always be the case that what is happening *now* is found to be *in media res*. To reiterate: that is because all actions exhibit Heidegger's ekstastic structure, always from a past on the way to a future that itself is returning to the present.

6 Action, Aspect and Narration

A final stage in my overall argument, before I can put it all back together again, is to demonstrate that actions, in Thompson's sense, have narrative structure. This is easily done if we look to Arthur Danto's *Narration and Knowledge* (see Danto 1985). Narratives, especially the sort that interest us, tend to be dramatic: that is, they involve more than a beginning, middle and end. Dramatic narratives involve conflict, climax and controversy, dénouements and missed opportunities. But these are not essential to narratives. Danto presents a theory of, as it were, the bare essential of narrative. He argues that narratives are comprised of statements referring to a special set of facts that can *only* be described with what he terms "narrative sentence." Narrative sentences have the following form: narrative sentences must refer to at least two time-separated

¹⁴This of course requires rejecting bivalence, not only for the future, but the present. I have another paper that examines *this* consequence in detail, but it does not fit here.

¹⁵It is natural to ask, is there a bottom level to this, a doing that is not composed of smaller doing-parts, an action-atom, so to speak? Interested readers should consult Thompson, who provides a lengthy argument for why this is not so.

events but they only *describe* the earliest event to which they refer. Narrative sentences are always parts of narrative explanations, which have the following form (see Danto 1985, 236):

- (1) x is F at t_1
- (2) H happens to x at t_2
- (3) x is G at t_3

(Of course, (2) might be a self-cause or self-happening, as, in Aristotle's example, the doctor healing herself.) In this model, F and G are predicate variables, to be replaced with contrary predicates, while x is a singular variable to be replaced with a singular referring expression. This is the bare essential structure of any narrative event (narrative fact, in my sense). For example (Danto's: Danto 1985, 236):

"The Duke of Buckingham favours the marriage at t_1 and the Duke of Buckingham opposes the marriage at t_3 "

Any such event has a beginning, middle and end, corresponding to the numbers above. Sometimes these are dramatic events. But they need not be. The following also satisfies Danto's bare essential structure:

John is walking to the store at t_1 and John has arrived at the store at t_3 .

Here, too, in a very mundane affair, we have a beginning, middle and end. What is essential to narrative, besides this logical form, is the necessary reference to two times. A narrative like the ones here can only be told *from the future*. It's only true at t_1 that Jon was walking to the store if, at some time later, he actually arrived. Similarly, it's only true that the shot heard round the world was the start of the American Revolution if, at some time later, that revolution was actually completed. It should be easy to see now that the bare essential structure of narrative is none other than what we have discussed under telic aspect.

7 Aspect and Selfhood

It's time to return to the question of selfhood. I claim that narrative constitutes the further fact of personal identity. We are now in a position to build back to that claim. One of my subordinate claims is that narrative identity is founded on narrative facts, not on the stories told. We now have an explanation as well as justification for these narrative facts. Narrative facts correspond to actions in Thompson's 'naive' sense. The central part of that thesis is that actions are made intelligible by other actions, by being *parts* of those larger actions. Actions have this structure. This structure does not relate to events as theories to data. Stories are not, in the first place, *interpretations* of actions. Stories

describe and explain actions.¹⁶ They are able to describe and explain actions because there are narrative facts there to be described. Yet just as normal facts obtain regardless of whether they are stated, so too with narrative facts. An example of a narrative fact might be: I am hammering the strut in order to construct the frame. Another would be: I am flexing my rotator muscles to lift the hammer. The difference between these two is that, in the first instance, I may very well be thinking to myself, "Hammer in order to finish the frame," while in the second I am *not* thinking to myself, even implicitly, "flex the shoulder muscle to raise the hammer." Thomspson's primary argument is that the difference between the two doings is not one of action vs. a nonaction. Both are actions, and we are only led to deny this if we insist that an action proper must be explicitly intended or wanted. That this is not the case--that my own self-understanding and self-narration sometimes is *false*--is evidenced in the observation that what I have in fact done can be quite at odds with what I told myself I was doing. A student tells himself that by drinking heavily and skipping classes he is just trying to have the 'college experience'; in fact he is ruining his education. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern believe that they are sailing for England. In fact, they are sailing towards their deaths. I believe that I am saving the man; in fact I have killed him. Now suppose that I go home before learning that he has died because of my intervention, and that I never learn of his death. I will go to my grave with the self-narrative that I am a life-saver, but *in fact*--as the *true* story of my life would reveal--I am a killer.

So far however I have focused on actions as part of larger actions. What about Dasein's selfhood? I contend that this analysis of action scales up to include Dasein or human existence as a whole. Just as smaller actions are parts of larger actions, so too is *every* action Dasein performs ultimately part of *one* whole deed, Dasein itself. To deliver on this claim, it will have to be shown that a life is not only comprised of many deeds, but is itself *one entire* deed. I submit this as the key behind Heidegger's analysis of death, his definition of Dasein as being-towards-death, and also Dasein's finitude. I take issue therefore with those who--like Blattner and Guignon--interpret Death as an occasional and potentially passing existentials of Dasein. Death marks the end of Dasein as an event. It is not, as Heidegger repeatedly stresses, a mere stopping or endpoint. Death is not a stopping, we are now equipped to say, because life is not an activity. Life, Dasein, is movement. Death is the culmination of Dasein's life, for Dasein is dynamis kata kinesis. It is always an answer, to the question what are you doing? that you are living. And it is always correct to re-phrase that answer as: I am dying.

But how is death something one does? More specifically, how is life a kinesis culminating in death as one deed? The idea that life is oriented towards one goal is familiar enough. Aristotle, and more recently, Alasdair MacIntyre, argue that everything we do is ultimately intelligible only in relation to one goal, namely, happiness or flourishing. But it is relevant to my thesis that happiness for Aristotle is an *energeia*, and

¹⁶This has been a point emphasized repeatedly and convincingly by David Carr.

is achievable. Likewise for MacIntyre's unity of character. Death for Heidegger, however, is not achievable, and we are interpreting life as kinesis, not *energeia*. What to make of this?

First lets distinguish three different types of being: states, activities and accomplishments. The latter two are essentially temporal, the former not. Heidegger insists often that Dasein is not an occurrent being (Dasein is never *vorhanden*), but states are occurrent. Does Dasein then have no states? Knowledgeable, six-feet tall, son of Peter, thirty years old--these are each states: can Dasein be none of them? Blattner has explained how we might in fact treat each of these as *capabilities* or activities rather than states. He writes:

"Being six feet tall or biologically female is a state, not an ability; it involves no know-how. But being tall (in the stature sense) or feminine is an ability. It is a way of handling oneself and relating to others" (Blattner 1996, 100).

But what sort of activities are these? It seems to me that they are performatives, not activities in the aspectual sense. A performance is anything at which I can fail, and at least taking Blattner's examples, I can certainly fail at being tall in stature, at being masculine or feminine. If we use Blattner's insight then we are allowed to think of at least most states and activities as performatives and therefore as movements.

I'm not sure that I want to commit myself to that thesis universally. But regardless of its scope, it does allow us to classify Dasein's existence exclusively into activities and performances. This in turn can help us to better understand how Dasein's life is a whole doing. Dasein is, to put the thesis bluntly, the performance, in the sense understood through telic aspect, of death. Think about doings like "the college experience." I contend that there is a truth underlying our talk of one's "college experience." On the face of it, of course, this is absurd. We have an idea of experiences as confined, if not to the specious present, then at least to periods of wakefulness. That is to say, a common sense of "experience" holds that experiences are individuated by the limits of the specious present, or by periods of wakefulness. Yet I think that there is a perfectly sensible meaning to "the college experience" provided that we interpret it not as something one has experienced but as a single thing one has done. Going to college is something that you did, and this larger deed involved many smaller deeds: studying at the library, walking to class, boiling ramen, sleeping, passing exams, and so forth. These are "parts" of the single deed, going to college. I can think of even larger doings: raising a family (with smaller deeds involving taking the kids to school, preparing dinner, working, buying a house), growing up, growing old. I suggest that we can think of dying as just the broadest category of all. 'Life' is the largest thing that you do, and doing life is to die. Everything that you have done, are doing and ever will do is ultimately a 'part' of dying, as walking to class is part of the college experience and preparing dinner is part of raising a family. Ultimately, everything you do with your life is part of and encompassed by dying. Once you die, your life has not merely stopped, it is *done*.

Our lives as a whole have telic aspect. This is, on my way of seeing things, how we ought to interpret Heidegger's 'original temporality.' The anti-narrativist discussed above are right to emphasize Dasein's incompleteness, but fail, in my opinion, to understand the nature of this incompleteness. Dasein is not a "nullity" (Guignon's term); nor is Dasein a disruption or anything else of the sort. Dasein is incomplete or 'not yet' in the same way that an acorn is not yet a tree, or I am walking to the store but not yet there, or I am raising a family but not yet finished.

To continue with the point: earlier we saw Fisher reject the narrative reading of Heidegger on the grounds that narrative involves self-projection yet Dasein's futurity is not a 'planning.' True enough, Dasein's temporal being is not grounded in Dasein's cognitive capacities or mental representations. On the face of it, such an interpretation is directly contrary to the general thesis of *Being and Time*, and this is why Heidegger should not be read through NT. But just because Dasein's futurity is not grounded in Dasein's mental representations it does not follow that narrativity is incidental to Dasein. Dasein is narrative, not in its thinking, but in its being. 'Telic aspect' is the concept that lets us make sense of this. It is true, for example, that the Emperor of the French completed his schooling in Brienne in 1784, but that fact was not true in 1784. It did not become true until 1804. Similarly, it's true that Goethe started his masterpiece in 1772, although that did not become true until 1806, and might never have been true if Goethe, like so many others of his age, had died in battle against the French before Faust was completed. Finally, that telic aspect is the appropriate concept for understanding death is made patently clear in the following passage:

"The ripening fruit...is not only not indifferent to its unripeness as an other to itself, but, ripening, it *is* the unripeness. The not-yet is already included in its own being, by no means as an arbitrary determination, but as constituent. Correspondingly, Da-sein, too, *is always already its not-yet* as long as it is" (Heidegger 1996, 226-227).

Death, as I think we should understand it, is the 'further fact' in the sense that, once it occurs, one's life is over and everything in one's life that was still outstanding is not complete. In this way death completes life, and unifies all the moments of one's life into a 'whole life.' At any given moment while alive we are all potentially this or that, in an infinite variety of ways. This is true, even as we say, at the 'end of life.' Heidegger never finished *Being and Time*. It was always outstanding. But there was a potential, until the end, that he would return and finish it. After his death, and *only then*, can we say, *Being and Time* was done. Similarly, Heidegger was a bad person, an unapologetic former Nazi. Up until the end, perhaps, he could have made amends, apologized and attempted to do some right. He did not, and now never will. Up to his death, in other words, Heidegger could have become a good, or at least better, person. But now he never will, for Heidegger is done.

To summarize: I claim that there are narrative facts. Narrative facts are the results of our doings. Doings are ultimately intelligible as parts of larger doings, and are comprised of smaller doings. While there is no smallest doing, there is a final or largest one, and that is death. Death is the largest narrative fact. Everything that we do is part of our own death. Death is the further fact that constitutes who we are. Until death, we are always becoming, and in the sense described under telic aspect, do not completely or wholly exist. Understanding this 'not yet' nature of Dasein, as interpreted by Heidegger, has led some philosophers to find something esoteric or radical in Heidegger's theory, but it is not necessary to read this way. Dasein's death, its negativity, its outstandingness—while Dasein has a particular way of dying, and not-being, and being-outstanding, the general structure is found throughout all existence, in any event properly described with verbs of telic aspect.

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