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"Memory is Identity": Probing into a Persistent Barnesian Obsession

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Abstract

Most of the fictional and nonfictional works by Julian Barnes deal with identity-related memory. By raking up the theme of memory, we are led to some interesting discoveries about the author's persistence in his postmodernist literary investigation into the nature of narrative art and the ethical implications thereof. A logical development is expected to be found between the two through close textual analysis, so as to reveal aspects of his unique moral concern.

Keywords

Memory, Personal Identity, Julian Barnes, Ethical Implications, Postmodernism

1. Introduction

When Julian Barnes affirms that "memory is identity" and "identity is memory" (Barnes, 2008) in his memoir *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*, his obsession with myriad of issues related to memory is stretched to its last full measure. Right within this 68-chapter and 138-page soliloquy, while the word identity appears 5 times, memory does 35 times, where "the balance between surgical reminiscence and deprecating self-knowledge is abetted by the suave irony that drives the narration". (Callus, 2012) In fact, memory in its broadest sense spans the entirety of his oeuvre. Maricel Piqueras, for instance, unveils the implicit attempt in Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending* as "a tendency to take stock of our lives", so as to "manage those bad memories". (Piqueras, 2014) Piqueras rightly concludes that "memory is a double-edged weapon," and that feelings and emotions "give subjectivity to our memories" and "require constant reconsideration and rewriting of who we are." In "Julian Barnes and the Postmodern Problem of Truth," Abigail Dalton examines *Talking It Over* and *Love, Etc.*, two fictional

works that "zero in on memory as the theme". (Dalton, 2008) "The folly of memory and reliability" is emphasized instead of "the unreliability of human interpretation and point of view" in previous novels like *Flaubert's Parrot* and *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*. In *Arthur & George*, 25 words of memory have been used to refer to the root cause of the confounding of reality and imagination.

In an earlier 1986 novel, *Before She Met Me*, Barnes tints his inquiry into the delicacy between memory and past events with violence as a result of jealousy. While the protagonist, one Graham Hendrick, an academic historian, surreptitiously digs into the erotic past of his new-found love, his sense of uncertainty is increasingly aggravated by the curiosity about the truth of past events in her former career as an actress out of his own excavation, by the faulty representations of this spoiled sweetheart, and by the often contradictory arrays of traces of memory from two people of the conflict of interest--Anne his second wife and Jack his close friend, the two having been sexually involved formerly. "The events described in the novel are distinctly contemporary", Anthony Giddens believes, as "today it is commonplace for a woman to have multiple lovers prior to entering a 'serious' sexual involvement", (Giddens, 1992) which explains the underlying impetus for the protagonist's confabulations in memory.

While Piqueras and others become intrigued in the practical disciplinary significance of the Barnesian preoccupation with memory, narrative gerontology and literary gerontology for instance, still a few care about the ingenious ways in which Barnes keeps the understated Englishness intact as he unfolds the emotive landscape in many fictional and nonfictional works; nonetheless, Barnes seems to have much greater aspirations in laboring for a profoundness in the understanding of memory and identity, a sustained empirical British tradition. Nothing can more poignantly stab into a desperate son than a failing father hesitating about his wife's identity, "I think you're my wife". (Barnes, 2008) On the other hand, however, Barnes reveals an intention to balance between truth and narrative art, "pretending that the solidity of narration is a proof of truth." To enhance his insightfulness, Barnes lists in a compendium of historical instances incorporating Plato, Rachmaninov, Flaubert, Turgenev, Daudet, Zola, Edmond de Goncourt, Gide, Shostakovich, Jules Renard, Montaigne, Larkin, Arthur Koestler, Dodie Smith, Maugham, and a lot more. He makes his own memoir an intermittent but full-fledged recollection of illustrative memoirs to prove that "we talk about our memories, but should perhaps talk more about our forgetting." He even made the narrator Tony remark that "memory equals events plus time" (Barnes, 2011).

How much, then, we wonder, has Barnes become interested in this ancient problem of memory, both as a postmodern British writer and a well-informed moral preacher on the subject? Has he been "trying to work out how dead they are" because "[N]arratively, they survive in the memory, which some trust more than others"; (Barnes, 2008) or is it a universal need for contemporaries to re-

concile themselves with distorted personal and emotive bearings so as to justify past events in their life? If so, what are the suggestions Barnes offers us as moral guides?

2. The Barnesian Concerns about Memory Issues

Memory makes us who we are regardless of age and what stage of life we presently live. In other words, memory is the key to personal identity—a sense of true self depends so much on it. Obviously, the memory-dependent issue of personal identity is directly related to ethics, which can mean how we should live our lives, what lurks under our desires for survival and immortality, where our moral responsibility lies in relation to other people and a myriad of practical concerns. In this age of great advancement of both medical science and technology, our much prolonged lifespan increases both in number and variety of the anxieties we rarely met with formerly, adding insult to injury. This does not suggest, of course, that memory has never troubled great minds as remote in history as Socrates. Since Locke's time when memory became a serious metaphysical issue, technical challenges have in fact kept boggling the mind of so many contentious souls. Traditionally, identity-related memory has been investigated from two opposite perspectives, the one setting psychological criterion of personal identity, the other physical—both centering on the significance of the connections with memories, intentions, beliefs and the similarity of character. When one stresses the psychological side of the issue, it becomes such a phrasing as Parfit's: "X at t_1 is the same person as Y at t_2 if and only if X is uniquely psychologically continuous with Y, where psychological continuity consists in overlapping chains of strong psychological connectedness". (Parfit, 1984) However, other thinkers like Joseph Butler and Thomas Reid favored a substance-based view of identity against the Lockean idea of association.

Today, technological progress in genetic engineering complicates the problem and difficulty in technical discussions grows exponentially. There are puzzle cases, for instance, that threaten to nullify even temporary prepositions. As Kwok-Choi Lau explains in an M. Phil. thesis,

Puzzle cases are cases in which a person has gone through physical or psychological changes after which his identity becomes ambiguous, in which one finds it difficult to apply ordinary criteria of personal identity to settle the issue, or in which the competing psychological criteria (personality, memory, etc.) and physical criteria (bodily identity, etc.) weigh equally against each other to produce contradictory results (Lau, 1976).

Summing up the various serious but also intriguing hypotheses, Lau comes up with three groups of puzzle cases:

1) Cases that involve a. change of personality, character traits and memory claims without apparent alteration of the corporeal body;

2) Cases of personality or memory change as a result of brain transplantation;

3) Cases in which the reduplication of personality is brought about either by

transplantation of hemispheres of the same brain into two bodies, or by transplantation of memory cells, or by induction or feeding of memory information from one brain to another.

The persistent Lockean influence can always be felt however the discussions proceed. This is so because memory per se presents newer metaphysical challenges along the way. For instance, about the accuracy of memory, there have been increasing controversies. On the one hand, commonsense agrees that memory does not necessarily provide us with accurate representations of past events; on the other hand, memory in written and unwritten forms remains to be the only faculty by which we associate the present with the past. Such controversies lead us naturally into more poignantly felt divides between the ways to discern how one's experiences of past events correspond to their reliable representations (let aside numerous cases of wishful forgetting), which suggests that accuracy of one may not guarantee that of the other. As an agnostic and one well informed of British empiricism, Julian Barnes refers to such controversies in his own highly illustrative ways, though in more cases than not, he shunned abrupt affirmations.

The issue of personal identity, one that obsesses Julian Barnes, finds itself meander along Barnesian works at different stages. Like anyone interested in the issue, scholars have never bothered about the real memory disorders. Barnes has not demonstrated any trace of scrutiny into the physical aspects of the issue; he is more concerned about the psychological part rather than the biological memory criterion in making certain of one's personal identity. Beginning from *Flaubert's Parrot*, the quest for identifying the true self takes place in both historical figures and the fictional narrators themselves, either in one concentrated case or in multidimensional endeavor. Of course, Barnes extends the issue to sequential topics covering both individual and historical memories to ease out his real brooding over one's moral choice. He does not take side with anyone over the debate, for instance, about the nature of autobiographical memories, though intuitively, he sees it as an active construction of one's life narrative. For another instance, Barnes rarely discusses about emotions of past events like nostalgia. Not that affect does not play a role in his fictional works, nor that Barnes himself as a writer has never experienced traumatic events in his personal life, it is simply the art of narration that has averted his attention to such technical considerations. In many cases, it is the remembered anger that prevents one from remembering a certain past event in it entirety. When our true sense of a decent self is at stake, we often choose to forget, at least certain about the critical details.

Talking about memories beyond individual persons, things get event more complicated. In social sciences and history, what are remembered by a nation, a tribe or a special group of people as facts have begun to be checked more rigorously, producing large amount of literature that aggravates the disciplinary embarrassment. Amnesia of a human society runs along the systematic confabulations of particular human groups, which facts draw enduring attention from

Julian Barnes who demonstrated such historical events in his various forms of works. Although we are not sure whether Barnes proves the unreliability of personal memory through faulty representations in the form of documents in human history or vice versa, most of the tittles of his work point obviously to that intention. Unresolved debates renew themselves over the problem of forgotten evidence, defeat and stored beliefs (Moon, 2012).

Likewise, the existence of a duty to remember is controversial; and by the same token, some believe we have the duty to forget in many cases. (Rieff, 2016) In view of proponents of the ethics of memory, remembering as mental time travel to both past and future events (in the form of imagination) entails a moral responsibility: subjects with deficits in episodic memory and episodic future thought make moral judgments similar to those made by normal subjects, (Craver, 2016) as Craver et al. explain*. And* such an obligation holds true at the individual and the collective level, as not just a few believe (Blustein, 2008). What might have intrigued Julian Barnes the most is a proposition that we have a duty to forget so that some people may have a new start after inappropriate words and deeds. To Barnes, these "some people" can be ourselves who, especially in leisurely retirement, prefer to choose between remembering and forgetting to ease out the remaining years of restlessness.

3. Decades of Barnesian War over Memory

From *Metroland* (1980) on, Julian Barnes has become obsessed with the miracles memory can work. A man deep in the middle-age crisis should attribute his mundane marriage and dull daily routines in the suburb of London to a different choice when he was young in Paris as a graduate student. The prejudice in one's memory (as is usually found in many similar recollections) surely links an either/or dilemma with the carefree youth without a just treatment of those lonely moments when life decisions were so difficult. Fortunately, Christopher Lloyd the protagonist balances the obviously wry observation of life with a choice of denying the offer from a childhood friend Toni who proposed to have an exciting experience as a Bohemian vagabond. Youthful contempt for the bourgeois establishment or a secure job and career, which is a better choice? And if so, are there really meaningful choices in this life? Many of the considerations over the choice for one's self-identification from the perspective of conscious memory are already overshadowed in this debut novel.

Then, if *Before She Met Me* (1982) is a thriller-like novel about a commonplace scandal among friends that ends in bloody slaughter, the superimposition of one's own memory on top of a jealousy-driven investigation into the privacy of a beloved carries Barnes's obsession with memory into a new pattern. This time the protagonist's investigation is frequently confirmed by the woman in question, with a large area of unknown history hidden somewhere. By doing so, "some long-broken line of communication to a self of twenty years ago had suddenly been restored", (Barnes, 2011) which means he is actually digging a

ditch for both defense and burial. The fury incited by memory of his own frustrations in the past can only end up in a stabbing, into his own self rather than the torso of an unfortunate rival in love, purely of his own imagination.

In *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), Julian Barnes's sense of wonder about memory grows into a full-blown kaleidoscope of fantasies. The digressive and cuckolded amateur Flaubert biographer aims at no truer portrait of the French novelist than an appeasement to his own shattered self. This unprofessional biographical study by an experienced doctor Geoffrey Braithwaite constructs obviously a professionalism that aims at the wrong target, which is often the case in most of Barnes's works to serve his purpose. To avoid confounding from the point that "the narrator may be a betrayed husband who finds difficulty in accepting it", (Dobrogoszcz, 1999) Barnes makes the doctor confess straightforwardly in a monologue,

> Three stories contend within me. One about Flaubert, one about Ellen, one about myself. My own is the simplest of the three—it hardly amounts to more than a convincing proof of my existence—and yet I find it the hardest to begin. My wife's more complicated, and more urgent; yet I resist that too. Keeping the best for the last, as I was saying earlier? I don't think so; rather the opposite, if anything. But by the time I tell you her story I want you to be prepared: that's to say, I want you to have had enough o f books, and parrots, and lost letters, and bears, and the opinions of [critics], and even the opinions of Dr Geoffrey Braithwaite. Books are not life, however much we prefer it if they were. Ellen's is a true story; perhaps it is even the reason why I am telling you Flaubert's story instead (Barnes, 1985).

In reshuffling the above cards, he finds his perfidious wife a stranger, "someone I feel I understand less well than a foreign writer dead for a hundred years." Digging deeper into the French writer's life might provide some kind of a consolation he needs badly; for while protruding into his wife's past might reveal himself as a cuckold, doing so into Flaubert's past should definitely result in a preferred leveling of an unbalanced selfhood, because "Braithwaite perceives a special kind of unity between himself and Flaubert, but the obvious proofs of his reluctance present in the story show his real reasons for discussing the French writer," namely his married life parroting that of the protagonists of Bovary. (Dobrogoszcz, 1999) The very first time the word memory appears in the novel is Flaubert and his young pal's "final, favorite" visit to a brothel. As no one can ever be so sure about the fact (not noted in any professional Flaubert biography), Braithwaite confounds the biographical sketches with many unsolicited conjurations such as Flaubert's suffering from syphilis, intimate involvement with both male and female partners, and a labyrinth of weird sayings nowhere to be proved. The ostensible unraveling of the many mysteries in the French writer's life amounts to "Barnes's central premise that identity is a mercurial consequence of discourse". (Scott, 1990) In other words,

> ... what knowledge is useful, what knowledge is true? Either I have to give you so much information about myself that you are forced to admit that I could no more have killed my wife than Flaubert could have committed suicide; or else I merely say, that's all, that's enough. No more (Barnes, 1985).

The many roles Braithwaite plays: biographer, scholarly essayist, omniscient narrator, existential philosopher, lead him into one purpose to serve: "I have to invent my way to the truth," (Barnes, 1985) the truth of his wife, Flaubert and himself. But this very fact of altering through the shifts of discourse, his selfhood becomes unsettled and questionable—a point in Barnes's narrative design. In view of this, the search for Flaubert's parrot (which is never to be ascertained literally), the starting point of the biographic exploration and also the final episode of the book, leads readers into a dead-lane inquiry no more of Braithwaite's identity than of the unprofessional biographer's thirst for consolation. The narrator's purposeful digressions from readers' concern sets up a successful stage on which a labyrinth of actual and possible meanings can be performed and demonstrated. Dazzled readers can have but one conclusion: there can never be objective history, nor can there be any absolute truth in anything of our great concern, except for the shrapnel of scattered documents, fragmentary and incomplete.

A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters (1989) echoes the same message that "[w]e make up a story to cover the facts we don't know or can't accept." (Barnes, 2009) The collective memory about the stage prop of Ark, for instance, persists in its anamorphosis in the remaining parts of the novel, from *Santa Euphemia* in the second chapter to the Bishop's collapsed throne in the third, the struggling boat in the fourth, the unfortunate boat of Medusa in the fifth, the planks of Noah's Ark in the sixth, the Titanic, the whale and the liner St. Louis in the seventh, and elsewhere. There could be no view than this panorama of the Ark that can express Barnes's sarcasm more poignantly about so important an event in the Old Testament. If the two daring women, Miss Logan and Miss Fergusson, fell short of the top of the Great Ararat where angels take the shape of white clouds, then the Sino-Kurdish expedition in the same place could not have yielded any more promising results in 2010. What Barnes has in mind in this sarcastic portrait of the reckless adventure by two frail women is but a joke, as is succinctly described in a discussion between the Fergusson father and daughter about the "divine intent, benevolent order and rigorous justice" after "examining the same world." How can one make sense of the Noah's Ark? The young Fergusson has the following.

She believed in the reality of something ordained by God and described in a book of Holy Scripture read and remembered for thousands of years; whereas he believed in the reality of something described in the pages of Saunders' News-Letter & Daily Advertiser, which people were unlikely to remember the very next morning.… [w]hich of them…was the more credulous?

The collage of chronicles, historical records, court proceedings and personal accounts speaks of the unreliability of history in a convincing way. The accusation of woodworms, for instance, offers an irony about religious truths that is reinforced by other genres. The very fact that court proceedings accusing a woodworm of murder are juxtaposed against personal accounts pokes fun at the nature of so-called historical truths, as the placid and seemingly rational narration runs against the wild stream-of-consciousness to illustrate the same idea. Historians may talk in similar ways, but they tell lies in their respective ways, just like the various narratives in the novel all refer to the same Ark: fiction, prose, comments, fable, essay and even theses. This is so because all these narratives come from roughly the same uncertainty in human memory. If Noah's Ark can be such stage props to be employed and disposed of at will, what trust can we have in any kind of redemption, even it is assured in the Holy Scripture?

Again in *Staring at the Sun*, he has phrases like "false memory," "a sharp memory," "a tangy memory," and "a clear-cut memory," phrases that continue to show his obsession with problems caused by the faulty memory. Barnes can't help but make his direct statement on the cause of memory failure in *Talking It Over*:

> The point about memory is this. I've noticed that most people over the age of forty whinge like a chainsaw about their memory not being as good as it used to be, or not being as good as they wish it were. Frankly I'm not surprised: look at the amount of garbage they choose to store. Picture to yourself a monstrous skip crammed with trivia: singularly ununique childhood memories, 5 billion sports results, faces of people they don't like, plots of television soap operas, tips concerning how to clean red wine off a carpet, the name of their MP, that sort of thing. What monstrous vanity makes them conclude the memory wants to be clogged up with this sort of rubbish? (Barnes, 1991)

Obviously, "[i]n fourteen hundred and ninety two Columbus sailed the ocean blue. And then what? She couldn't remember". (Barnes, 2009) With this, "[m]y way with memory is to entrust it only with things it will take some pride in looking after", (Barnes, 1991) because "I don't remember. I won't remember. Memory is an act of will, and so is forgetting".

Then in *England, England* (1998), in addition to historical facts, Julian Barnes alters old English folklore, customs and legends too into a new myth, confounding the lines between truth and fiction, reality and art, history and memory. The last part of the novel features Martha pondering about her past in the rural setting, ostensibly justifying her experiences in the land of replica with chosen memory materials. This satire, shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1998, carries with it a postmodernist sense of subversion and the characteristic dystopian and farcical elements. The farce about Anglia posts a serious challenge to our understanding of nationality in its tradition.

As a sequel to *Talking It Over*, *Love, etc* (2000) brings our attention back from

nation-wide megalomaniac projects to an interpersonal tragicomedy, both based on wishful thinking and emotional prejudice of memory. The personal memory issue is soon picked up in *Arthur & George* (2005); but this time again, the book does not aim to stick closely to the historical record: two very different and fictional British men are intertwined in a story with the world-famous author of the Sherlock Holmes stories, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. By tracing personal stories, Barnes allows memory to have a full play of itself, so the "contemporary novel set in the past" can carry his obsession with memory to a new case.

The Sense of an Ending (2011), the title of which novel taken from another book by Frank Kermode and dedicated to "making sense of the ways we try to make sense of our lives," (Kermode, 2000) illustrates Barnes's attempt to wake up one's buried memory and begin a new life of moral awareness. It is again on the memory which personal truths are built to know exactly what happens. By re-evaluating the story already narrated, and by clarifying embarrassing events in his younger days, the protagonist sees through himself as a guilt-ridden coward, but tries to reconfigure his memory. Barnes suggests that realizing our own malicious and unpleasant past deeds that have been erased from our memory presupposes a conscience that bridges up many of the gaps between ourselves and the people living around us. It is precisely the reason why *The Guardian*'s Justine Jordan said "[w]ith its patterns and repetitions, scrutinizing its own workings from every possible angle, the novella becomes a highly wrought meditation on ageing, memory and regret." (Justine, 2011) In this novelette, there are 32 words of "memory" in addition to 54 words of "remember" to affirm that "[H]istory is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation". (Barnes, 2011) He has the following to elaborate his idea:

> We live with such easy assumptions, don't we? For instance, that memory equals events plus time. But it's all much odder than this. Who was it said that memory is what we thought we'd forgotten? And it ought to be obvious to us that time doesn't act as a fixative, rather as a solvent. But it's not convenient—it's not useful—to believe this; it doesn't help us get on with our lives; so we ignore it.

And finally, "I was so ill at ease that I spent the entire weekend constipated: this is my principal factual memory. The rest consists of impressions and half memories which may therefore be self-serving," which in fact repeats the opening remark: "but what you end up remembering isn't always the same as what you have witnessed." And in another paragraph,

> How often do we tell our own life story? How often do we adjust, embellish, make sly cuts? And the longer life goes on, the fewer are those around to challenge our account, to remind us that our life is not our life, merely the story we have told about our life. Told to others, but—mainly—to ourselves.

As a wry account of both national and personal anecdotes narrated by a Francophile, Barnes's *Cross Channel* in 1996 has twisted historical accounts unnoticed, ostensibly portraying figures and events for their own sake. The kaleidoscopic perspectives all build on a chosen segment of his memory to further blur the demarcation between truth and fiction. The intended blurring is again found in the in provocative scenarios in *The Lemon Table* (2004), a collection of eleven short stories mostly published in *The New Yorker* and other highbrow magazines. For instance, "A Short History of Hairdressing" sounds pretty much the same with a budding beginning, a youthful period and a middle-aged last phase of any literary movement. "The Things You Know," for another instance, records two reminiscing women who cheat each other by their respective half memory, with a lot unsaid. You find too many pieces of surrealistic images in the collection to forget about Barnes's wonderful play of the frailties of memory behind the sharp and comic pleasures.

In *Levels of Life* (2013), Julian Barnes relates three true stories that epitomize three pairs of lost love in reminiscences, one ended by a crash, the other by a spear-thrust through the neck and the last by the loss of his agent wife. Again, this memoir features a one-sided extraction of past experiences. The category-defying book compares couples of people soaring toward the sky, courting fruitlessly and lamenting and complaining non-stop. A major part of the *Levels of Life* "describes descent—no upper air, no perspective, just darkness and despair". (Morrison, 2013) While suffering from great grief, Barnes refuses to let out more information about his wife than needed. The despair out of the lack of true consolation does not outweigh one's desire to protect privacy, adding one more example of the unreliability of personal accounts.

4. Memory and Its Ethical Implications

When Julian Barnes asserts that memory is identity, he is actually referring us to a fact that memory makes who we are, since a great deal of our memory is associated to our selfhood. The question is roughly what is necessary and sufficient for a past or future being to be someone existing now. Traditionally, memory has been the most important criterion of personal identity. The Barnesian assertion that "memory is identity and identity is memory" pertains to the statement that memory presupposes personal identity and vice verse, since it is the memory that convinces us that we are the same person as who we were, say, 20 years ago. Although the connection between personal identity and memory has been robust, it suggests ongoing substantive and methodological problems. On the one hand, one's memory presentation may not correspond to the subject's experience of the past event due to misperception of the past event, therefore unauthentic; on the other hand, the memory presentation may not correspond to the past event itself, therefore untrue. In the two cases, neither the authenticity nor the truth of the correspondence between memory and personal identity is guaranteed.

When setting memory as the criterion of personal identity, the declaration memory is identity runs into greater problem, not least because one's amnesia does not rule out her existence. That is why Parfit and others keep upgrading the psychological criterion to allow more elements to be included like memories, intentions, beliefs/goals/desires, and similarity of character, thus arriving at a formula: "*X* at t_1 is the same person as *Y* at t_2 if and only if *X* is uniquely psychologically continuous with *Y*" (Parfit, 1984).

Scholars insisting on the psychological criterion have been trying to thwart the problem, because this criterion provides a better and more satisfying account of such a condition: one is not responsible for the actions of some person if he is not the inheritor of that person's psychology. Presently, the other theories—biological, narrative, and "anthropological" accounts, explain the relevance to ethics in their own ways, each leaving their respective unsatisfactory parts to be tackled with.

Fortunately, the thought experiments that stagger the correspondence between memory and personal identity fall short of Barnes' serious notice. We have every reason to believe that appealing to the scholarly rigidness concerning memory issues does not justify his literary efforts in the bulk of his writings. To Julian Barnes, how to hold one morally responsible for his/her past action depends on a process of reidentification that transcends one's hesitation about her own memory of a past event, that is: what are the conditions under which a person at one point in time is properly reidentified at another point in time? Like John Locke, Barnes rejects the substance-based view of identity that persons at different times are identical to one another in virtue of their consisting in one and the same substance. Rather, a relational account of identity makes more sense because persons at different times are identical to one another in virtue of some psychological or physical relation between them—a person or a moral agent *Y* at t_2 is identical to a person *X* at t_1 just in case *Y*'s consciousness "can be extended backwards" to *X*. (David, 2016) *Or,* in Locke's word, one sober man should not be accounted responsible for an action committed when he was mad and vice verse. Since human law emphasizes the necessity of continuous consciousness, theorists on identity and ethics must stick to this point whatever their arguments are.

In not a few of the works by Barnes, the narrative criterion of personal identity seems to be an intended effort to illustrate the idea, although Barnes expresses his intention in scattered phrases. This narrative criterion seeks to clarify that what makes an action, experience, or psychological characteristic properly attributable to a person (and thus a proper part of his or her true self) is its correct incorporation into the self-told story of his or her life, as explained by Schechtman. (Schechtman, 1996) The narrative criterion bypasses the pitfalls in previous criteria of identity and holds more water in the arguments. Many works by Barnes best illustrate his attempt to thwart the problems in traditional psychological criterion of personal identity. All of his attempts are built on a belief that

memory in large-scale groups (history collective memory) and small-scale groups (individual) can both be faulty. In *The Sense of an Ending,* for instance, Barnes convinces us that traumatic memories are formed after an experience that causes high levels of emotional arousal and the activation of stress hormones, but one's sober moments (especially after retirement) can heal up by rearranging the episodic memories. An ethical life begins with such rearranging.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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