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I Am Not a Story

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Published on: Sep 03, 2015

DOI: 10.32376/3f8575cb.eedac621

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‘EACH OF US constructs and lives a “narrative”,’ wrote the British neurologist Oliver Sacks, ‘this narrative *is* us’. Likewise the American cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner: ‘Self is a perpetually rewritten story.’ And: ‘In the end, we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we “tell about” our lives.’ Or a fellow American psychologist, Dan P McAdams: ‘We are all storytellers, and we are the stories we tell.’ And here’s the American moral philosopher J David Velleman: ‘We invent ourselves... but we really are the characters we invent.’ And, for good measure, another American philosopher, Daniel Dennett: ‘we are all virtuoso novelists, who find ourselves engaged in all sorts of behaviour... and we always put the best “faces” on it we can. We try to make all of our material cohere into a single good story. And that story is our autobiography. The chief fictional character at the centre of that autobiography is one’s *self*.’

So say the narrativists. We story ourselves and we are our stories. There’s a remarkably robust consensus about this claim, not only in the humanities but also in psychotherapy. It’s standardly linked with the idea that self-narration is a *good* thing, necessary for a full human life....

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