

UNITED WISDOM

The Story I Tell About Myself

Human Nature and Inner World

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The Story I Tell About Myself

> *“I have no more made my book than my book has made me”*
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> *Michel de Montaigne, Essays, Book II, ch. XVIII “Of Giving the Lie”, trans. Charles Cotton (ed. W. C. Hazlitt): Project Gutenberg #3600.*

What this article is about

Many people have a short version of their own life, the one they give when they meet someone new, and a long one they tell themselves. Here is an invented example. Asked to “tell us about yourself”, a person in their mid-thirties laughs and says: “I’m the kind of person who gives up on everything halfway.” Music school, two degree courses, Spanish classes: it all seems to fit. A week later they turn down a new project at work: “What’s the point? I’ll only drop it anyway.”

A story about oneself is linked, in research, with the feeling of remaining oneself through change. But it also generalises, and a generalisation can quietly turn into a rule. This article asks how a self-story selects and connects events, and how its generalisations can be tested without destroying the meaning of the story itself.

We draw on Augustine, Montaigne, Socrates, Confucius, the Qur’an, the Gospel of Luke and The Questions of King Milinda, and on research into narrative identity, memory and writing about oneself, each source in its own context. The example is the authors’ invention. The way of testing that we propose is the authors’ own argument, not a proven technique; the article does not promise a “right” story and is no substitute for professional help.

I. A self-story selects and connects

A story about oneself is not a record of everything that happened but a selection: of thousands of lived episodes only a few get in, and links are drawn between them. Psychologists who study narrative identity put it this way: “Individuals develop a narrative identity through constructing and internalizing an evolving life story composed of significant autobiographical memories”. The sentence opens the abstract of a study by Elien Vanderveren and colleagues in Frontiers in Psychology (2021), and every word in it counts. *Constructing*: the story is not given ready-made. *Internalizing*: what has been built becomes part of how a person understands themselves. *Evolving*: it changes as life goes on. *Significant*: on our reading, the memories have been selected.

A clear example of selection is six sentences from the Analects, the record of Confucius’s conversations. The Master says: “At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning” — and then, stage

by stage, up to: “At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right” (trans. James Legge, Book II, ch. 4). In between, at thirty he stood firm, at forty he had no doubts, at fifty he knew the decrees of Heaven, and at sixty his ear had become obedient to truth. Six sentences, and not a word about family, office or loss. This is not a reproach: a story without selection is impossible. But every story is about something, and its subject decides what goes in and what stays out of the frame.

A story links past events not only with each other but also with the future. In Book X of the Confessions Augustine describes memory as a store: “Out of the same store do I myself with the past continually combine fresh and fresh likenesses of things which I have experienced, or, from what I have experienced, have believed: and thence again infer future actions, events and hopes” (trans. E. B. Pusey, Confessions, Book X). This is exactly where a generalisation enters the story. From what has gone into the story, it is easy to derive an expectation: if I have always given up, I will give up on this too.

II. One’s own testimony and other people’s

A self-story is made not only of what a person has lived through but also of what they know from others, and it helps to tell these layers apart. Augustine noticed this more than sixteen centuries ago. In the same Book X of the Confessions, describing memory as a vast storehouse, he says that he meets himself there too: he recalls when, where and what he did, and with what feelings. And he adds at once that all he remembers he holds either from his own experience or on “other’s credit”. The whole passage appears at the end of this article as the key quotation.

Everyone knows examples of the second layer. What I was like as a baby, when I said my first word, how I behaved at nursery: all this we know from our parents. But other people’s testimony reaches further. A phrase like “you were always the restless one”, repeated in a family many times over, can enter a person’s story on a par with what they actually lived through.

How far can such mixing go? A systematic review by Chris Brewin and Bernice Andrews (Applied Cognitive Psychology, 2017) examines three kinds of experiment in which adults were led to believe in false childhood events: imagination inflation, false feedback and memory implantation. The first two raised the belief that an event had happened, but as a rule not so far that it was no longer thought unlikely. In implantation studies, “some recollective experience for the suggested events is induced on average in 47% of participants, but only in 15% are these experiences likely to be rated as full memories”. The authors conclude that “susceptibility to false memories of childhood events appears more limited than has been suggested”.

Two lessons follow. Memory is not a video recording: what we have heard from others can be woven into a recollection. But it is not invention either: full false memories arise in a minority, about 15% on average, in the implantation studies, and in their general discussion the authors treat this share as rather an upper bound; they also warn that researchers' ratings do not necessarily match what participants report. How memory reconstructs the past is a large subject of its own. Here we need only one distinction: in one's own story it is worth marking where my experience speaks and where other people's testimony does.

III. "Why I am like this": explanations after the fact

Explanations in a self-story can be convincing and still be built after the fact. A vivid experiment on this was carried out by Lars Hall, Petter Johansson and Thomas Strandberg (PLOS ONE, 2012). A hundred and sixty volunteers aged 17 to 69, approached as they walked through a park, filled in a survey on moral questions: general principles, or contested issues then being debated in the media. By means of a magic trick with a glued-on paper slip, two of their ratings were secretly reversed, and the participants were then asked to discuss their answers.

The result: "the majority of the reversals remained undetected, and a full 69% of the participants failed to detect at least one of two changes". Moreover, "participants often constructed coherent and unequivocal arguments supporting the opposite of their original position". The authors propose that future studies explore further the role of self-attribution and after-the-fact rationalisation in the way attitudes form and change.

This result has to be carried over to life stories with care. The experiment dealt with opinions on public questions, not with events in anyone's biography; there were two reversals per person; it was run in one country, Sweden; and the situation itself was built on an illusion. It does not prove that our explanations of ourselves are false. It shows something else: the coherence and confidence of an explanation do not mean that this was the cause at work. "I dropped out because that's the kind of person I am" may be an explanation invented later, and still sound entirely sincere.

Augustine described the opposite case, when there is no explanation at all. In Book IV of the Confessions he tells how, after the death of a close friend, everything around him became a torment: "I became a great riddle to myself" (Confessions, Book IV). He asked his soul why she was so sad, and she could not tell him. This is an honest admission: the most important states are sometimes opaque even to ourselves. A story that has an answer ready for every "why" deserves a slower second reading.

IV. A coherent story is not yet a good life

In one study the coherence of a turning-point narrative was not associated with well-being. Of the identity measures, it was weakly associated only with less disturbed identity functioning, and showed no significant association with a consolidated sense of identity or with lack of identity. The expectation that telling your life neatly will make you feel better was not borne out in that study.

Vanderveren and colleagues surveyed 333 young Belgians aged 18 to 30 (72.1% women). Each told the story of a turning point: an experience that had changed their life or the kind of person they were. The coherence of these narratives was rated with a coding scheme (context, chronology, theme, causality) and compared with questionnaires on well-being, identity functioning and personality disorder symptoms. The result: “narrative coherence was not significantly related to psychological well-being, but yielded significant negative associations with disturbed identity functioning and antisocial PD symptoms” (Vanderveren et al., 2021). In other words, those who told their turning point more coherently showed slightly fewer signs of disturbed identity functioning; the authors themselves call the associations they found rather weak. This is an association, not a cause: the study is cross-sectional, it covers one country and one age group, and coherence was rated on a single memory rather than on a whole life story.

Another study shows what the sense of one’s life as a story is linked with. Emily Hong, Constantine Sedikides and Tim Wildschut (Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 2022) ran five studies (254, 250, 250, 174 and 146 participants; online samples in the United States, Korea and the United Kingdom) on nostalgia, a sentimental longing for one’s past, and on the sense of self-continuity, a connection between one’s past, present and future selves. Nostalgia predicted this sense in the correlational studies and, in the authors’ conclusion, increased it in the two experiments; in the first of them the difference from the control group did not reach the 0.05 significance level ($p = 0.056$). The link ran consistently through narrative, only sporadically through associative links with the past, and never through a belief that the self does not change: “Narrative emerged as the key mediator”. The authors note limitations: continuity and its bases were rated with single items, and the work should be complemented by analysing the narratives participants actually tell. The findings speak of a feeling, not of how accurate the story is.

Taken together, these studies warn against a simple formula. In the studies by Hong and colleagues the sense that one’s life forms a story was measured rather than manipulated, so its role as the main mediator is consistent with the idea that a story supports the feeling of being the same person, but does not prove it. Coherence, for its part, is a property of the story, not of its truth or its kindness. “I give up on everything halfway” is a very coherent sentence.

V. Generalisations: when episodes merge into “always”

Researchers of autobiographical memory distinguish specific memories, of a single event lasting no longer than a day, such as a long walk in a local park with two friends, from non-specific ones: of repeated events, say one’s daughters’ birthdays, or of long periods, such as how active one was as a teenager. These examples come from David Hallford and colleagues (Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy, 2022). We liken the generalisation “I always give up” to the second kind: it, too, folds many episodes into one. The likeness is ours: the researchers speak of memories retrieved to cue words, not of a person’s judgements about themselves.

This distinction has been studied a great deal in people with depression: difficulty in accessing specific memories, Hallford and colleagues write, has been established as a cognitive marker of it. They themselves meta-analysed 17 studies: people whose depression was in remission recalled fewer specific memories ($k = 15$; $g = -0.31$) and more general, “categoric” ones ($k = 9$; $g = 0.25$) than people who had never been depressed. The effects are small to moderate, and the results of individual studies diverge considerably; the authors say the robustness of the finding still needs to be established. The authors suggest that this feature of memory may be a risk factor for future episodes; this is a hypothesis resting on other work, not a proven cause. They also write that improving memory specificity could protect against relapse, but that is a clinical question for specialists, not advice for working on one’s own.

How the search for a memory comes to a halt at a general level is illustrated by a small study by Shamsul Haque and colleagues (BMC Psychiatry, 2014). They describe memory of oneself as a hierarchy: lifetime periods, measured in years; general events, repeated or extended, such as working in the office or suffering from tonsillitis; and specific episodes. Thirteen people with depression and thirteen without recalled events in response to fifteen cue words. Participants without depression more often went from the top down, from a period to a general event and on to a specific episode, whereas “depressed participants showed a tendency to terminate retrieval at the general event level”. The sample is very small, so this is no more than an illustration of a mechanism.

From these studies we take just one thing: the difference between general and specific levels of memory is real, and the search can stop at the general, intermediate level. It does not follow that someone who speaks in generalisations is ill, or that “remembering specifically” is a treatment. The language of “always” and “never” as such is a separate subject; here we are interested in which episodes a generalisation rests on.

VI. Testing a generalisation against specific episodes

A generalisation in a self-story can be tested by stepping down from it to the episodes. Let us say at once that this is our own argument, resting on indirect evidence, not a technique that anyone has tested in a study.

Take the sentence “I give up on everything halfway”. The test begins with what Augustine found in his memory of himself: when it was, where, what exactly I did, what I felt. Music school: at the age of ten, on the parents’ decision. The first degree course: abandoned after the first year, on realising that the subject had been chosen to keep a friend company. Spanish classes: dropped when a job changed. Then a second list is needed, of episodes that do not fit the generalisation: six years in one job, a long stretch of caring for a sick father, the second degree, which was in fact completed. And finally a note against each episode: do I remember this myself, or do I know it from others?

After such a check the generalisation may not disappear but become more precise. Instead of “I give up on everything”, it may turn into “I left the things I had not chosen myself”, or “I give up when I stop seeing the point and don’t say so out loud”. The meaning of the story survives, since it still contains a recognisable pattern, but its reach narrows: it no longer passes sentence on every future undertaking.

Why do we think this move is reasonable? First, the studies of memory show that general and specific levels differ, and that the search can stop at the general one. Second, the experiment by Hall and colleagues is a reminder that a confident explanation is not yet a cause. Third, there is an old tradition of examining oneself. In the Apology Socrates tells the court that “daily to discourse about virtue, and of those other things about which you hear me examining myself and others, is the greatest good of man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living” (trans. Benjamin Jowett, Apology 38a). He is speaking of moral examination in conversation, not of memory; we take from him only the thought that examination is a standing practice rather than a one-off confession.

The limits must be named too. Among our sources there is no study that tests such a check directly; we do not know how much it helps, or whom. And it should not turn into a new strict rule, such as “I must check myself all the time”.

VII. The co-authors of the story

A self-story is not written alone: the voices of family, surroundings and culture can be heard in it. Majse Lind, in an opinion article (Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2023), puts it plainly: “Identity is not solo-authored but a co-authored process influenced by several higher-order levels”. Following Bronfenbrenner’s ecosystem model, she lists these levels: stories from a person’s inner circle; stories that pass between such circles; the neighbourhood, local policy and the mass media; overarching cultural, political and religious “master narratives”; and finally time, with its life transitions and historical events. A person’s narrative both influences these stories and is influenced by them. This is a theoretical position without new data, written in the context of personality disorders; but the claim about co-authorship itself is stated in general terms.

Even the name with which a story begins comes from others. In the Buddhist dialogue The Questions of King Milinda, the monk Nāgasena tells the king that a name such as the one his parents gave him “is only a generally understood term, a designation in common use” (trans. T. W. Rhys Davids, Book II, ch. 1). For Buddhism these words belong to the teaching that there is no permanent individuality, and we do not enter that debate here. It is enough for us to note that the name is given by others and kept alive by a shared language.

Co-authors can also rewrite a story. In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), the younger son composes a speech about himself in advance: he has sinned, he is no longer worthy to be called a son, let his father make him one of the hired servants (vv. 18–19). His father sees him while he is still a great way off and runs to meet him (v. 20). The son begins the prepared speech (v. 21) but never reaches the request about the hired servants: the father speaks next and tells the servants to bring the best robe (v. 22). We read this as follows: the son’s story about himself met another story, the father’s.

How can one tell another voice from one’s own? One can ask of every important sentence about oneself: whose words were these first? The aim is not to throw away what comes from others (co-authors sometimes see more than we do) but to know where it came from. Family stories set against one’s own memories, and the different versions of oneself given to different people, are separate subjects; here we only name them.

VIII. Writing one’s story down: an honest measure of the benefit

Expressive writing, that is, writing about difficult events, brings a small but measurable benefit in studies; we carry this over to the story of a whole life with a caveat, and it does not promise transformation. The most concrete support here is a meta-analysis by Yeseul Lee, Dongil Kim and Jung-Eun Lim (Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2023). They gathered 29 Korean studies of expressive writing, a practice in which people freely write down their thoughts and feelings about stressful or traumatic events, published up to 2021. The overall effect was g = 0.33 (medium, on the authors’ scale), and 0.16 after correction for publication bias, that is, a small one; the authors compare this estimate with a Western meta-analysis in which it was 0.15. The effect was larger for structured than for free writing, with more sessions, with sessions longer than 15 minutes and at a delayed follow-up. The authors conclude that such writing is at least harmless and has a positive effect given how efficient and brief it is, including for people without apparent psychological problems.

The limits matter as well. All the studies were carried out in one country; most relied on self-report, and in half of them the follow-up came only one or two weeks later; expressive writing is writing about difficult events, not necessarily the story of one’s whole life; and with severe trauma or disorders, according to other studies the authors cite, such writing may not help. So the honest measure is this: writing one’s story down is probably worth doing, but one should not expect it to change one’s fate.

There is also a benefit of another kind, which the meta-analysis does not measure. A written story can be reread: one can see what went into it, what did not, and where its generalisations lie. Montaigne, who worked on his Essays for years, puts the effect of writing on the writer more strongly: he made his book no more than his book made him. In the same chapter he explains that, while he was moulding this figure upon himself, he so often had to straighten and compose himself that the pattern became fixed and partly shaped itself. There, too, he remarks that those who look themselves over only now and then, in passing, do not examine themselves as strictly or as deeply as someone who has made it their business. This is one author’s testimony about himself, not a law. But it describes well why a written story may turn out to be more than a copy: in Montaigne’s experience, writing acts on the writer too.

IX. “Coming to oneself”: a retelling that changes action

There are moments when a person retells their own situation to themselves differently, and then their action changes too. This is how we read the Gospel parable that calls such a moment coming to oneself.

The younger son in Luke’s parable took his share of the property, went into a far country and wasted it there. A famine came; he was sent to feed someone else’s swine and would gladly

have eaten the husks the swine ate, but no one gave him anything. And then: “And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!” (Luke 15:17, King James Version, Project Gutenberg #10). Straight afterwards he resolves to arise and go to his father.

What changed? Not the facts: the hunger and the swine were there before. The story changed. The son compared his position with that of the hired servants in his father’s house and named it plainly: “I perish with hunger”. The decision followed the accurate retelling. This is our reading; in the Gospel context the parable stands next to the words about joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10), and it speaks of repentance and of the father’s mercy, not of a technique of self-description.

The Confucian story is built differently. The six sentences of the Analects contain no crisis and no return, only a gradual path on which, on our reading, each stage grows out of the one before. Both forms, the turn and the ascent, can serve a story about oneself: one story can be told as a break, another as slow growth. Neither form is more correct than the other. But the form of a story suggests what to look for in it: in a story of a turn, the moment when the retelling became more accurate; in a story of growth, what was building up unnoticed.

For our subject the parable matters in one more way. Coming to oneself here does not mean inventing a new, flattering version of oneself. The son names the most unpleasant things: he is perishing with hunger, he has sinned, he is no longer worthy to be called a son. In the parable, the retelling that changes action begins by admitting the facts, not by going around them; our working criterion in the next section starts from here.

X. Objection and limit: reinterpretation or embellishment

The strong objection runs like this: if explanations are built after the fact and memory also rests on other people’s words, then every self-story is fiction and there is nothing in it to test. The evidence we have relied on does not show this. Brewin and Andrews’s review concludes that susceptibility to false childhood memories appears more limited than had been suggested. The experiment by Hall and colleagues concerns opinions on a survey, not the events of a life. A self-story is not a court record, but it is not fiction either: its material is episodes that can be recalled and checked.

The boundary lies elsewhere, between reinterpretation and embellishment, and it really is a fine one. Montaigne himself left a sentence that sits right on it: “painting myself for others, I represent myself in a better colouring than my own natural complexion” (trans. Charles Cotton, Essays, Book II, ch. XVIII). It can be read as an admission of embellishment, or as an observation that the portrait changed the original. On our reading, the context of the paragraph, where Montaigne describes how working on the record made him straighten and

compose himself, is closer to the second; Cotton's translation does not settle it. Reinterpretation changes the person and stays answerable to the episodes; embellishment changes only the picture.

The Qur'an names what does not vanish because of a successful excuse. Sura 75 says that on the Day of Resurrection a man will be told of all he has done, and that "a man shall be the eye witness against himself: And even if he put forth his plea" (trans. J. M. Rodwell, Sura 75). Near its opening the same sura mentions the "self-accusing soul". These are words about judgement and responsibility before God, not psychological advice. We take one thing from them: knowledge of what one has done is not cancelled by a successful explanation.

From this follows a working criterion, again our own: a retelling that names unpleasant facts is closer to reinterpretation; a retelling that serves to avoid them is closer to embellishment. The limit of our conclusion must be named as well: among the sources this article relies on, there are no long-term studies of which themes in a life story are linked to well-being years later, so we make no claim about which stories "make life better" in the long run.

What this means in practice

Below are questions for working with your own story. They are the authors' suggestion for reflection, not a technique with a guaranteed result, and not treatment.

1. Write down a short version of your story, five or six sentences, as in the Analects. Look at what went into it, what stayed out of the frame, and what the story turned out to be about.

2. Mark the generalisations in it: "always", "never", "I'm the kind of person who...". There is no need to refute them at once; first simply notice them.

3. For each generalisation, find three or four episodes: when it was, where, what I did, what I felt. If only the general comes to mind ("it was always like that at school"), try stepping one level down: a period of life → a repeated event → one particular day. The aim here is to check the generalisation against episodes, not to train memory: training memory specificity is a question for specialists (see section V).

4. Find episodes that do not fit the generalisation. Events that do not fit into the story at all are a separate conversation; here it is enough to see that exceptions exist.

5. Mark each episode: do I remember it myself, or do I know it from others?

6. Reword the generalisation so that it answers to the episodes: "I left the things I had not chosen myself" instead of "I give up on everything". The meaning of the story remains, and the verdict may become a description.

7. If you wish, talk the result over with someone you trust, remembering that they, too, are a co-author of your story.

What not to expect. Expressive writing has a small effect in studies; testing generalisations is the authors' move, not a proven method. If a dark generalisation about yourself will not let go and gets in the way of living, this is no longer an exercise to do on your own: it is sensible to see a doctor or a psychologist. If thoughts of harming yourself appear, seek help at once; in immediate danger, contact the emergency services in your country.

The person in our example, having made such a check, may find that what they gave up was mostly what they had not chosen themselves, while the new project at work is something they are choosing. Then the decision about the project is made by them, not by an old line about themselves.

Key quotation

> *"There also meet I with myself, and recall myself, and when, where, and what I have done, and under what feelings. There be all which I remember, either on my own experience, or other's credit."*
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> *Augustine, Confessions, Book X (ch. 8; X.8.14 in the usual Latin division; the copy has no chapter numbers), trans. E. B. Pusey: Project Gutenberg #3296.*

The quotation draws together two moves of the article. Testing a generalisation returns us to the same questions: when, where and what I have done. And distinguishing one's own experience from other people's testimony helps to see the co-authors of the story. It does not follow that memory is accurate: Augustine says where a person meets themselves, not that the meeting is true.

Connections between traditions

Comparison (side A ↔ side B)	Point of contact (similarity)	Essential boundary
Montaigne, Essays II.18 ↔ research on narrative identity (Vanderveren et al., 2021)	A self-story does not only describe a person but takes part in what they become: for Montaigne “my book has made me”; for psychologists a life story is constructed and internalised	Montaigne testifies about himself after many years of work on one book; the psychologists report sample averages (333 young Belgians, a single cross-section), and in their data coherence is weakly associated with less disturbed identity functioning, but not with well-being or with a consolidated identity; causation is not established
Augustine, Confessions, Book X ↔ Hong, Sedikides, Wildschut, 2022	The past serves as material for the future. Augustine on the store of memory: “thence again infer future actions, events and hopes”; in the research, the link between nostalgia and the sense of connection between past, present and future selves runs above all through narrative	Augustine describes a power of memory in an address to God; the studies measure felt continuity with single items in online samples, say nothing about the accuracy of the story, and narrative was measured, not manipulated
Augustine, Confessions, Book X ↔ Brewin, Andrews, 2017	Memory of oneself holds both what was lived and what was taken on others’ word, on “other’s credit”; a suggested event can partly enter a recollection	Augustine distinguishes sources of self-knowledge and says nothing about false memories; the review covers laboratory suggestion studies in which, with implantation, full false memories occur in about 15% (by the authors’ estimate, rather an upper bound), and the authors judge susceptibility more limited than had been suggested
Qur’an, Sura 75:14–15 ↔ Hall, Johansson, Strandberg, 2012	A persuasive account of oneself is not yet the truth about oneself: in the Qur’an a plea does not cancel a man’s witness against himself; in the experiment people often persuasively defend a position they did not choose	The Qur’an speaks of the Day of Resurrection and of responsibility before God for deeds; the experiment concerns opinions on a survey with a trick, without deeds or guilt, and the explanations there are built without any intent to deceive; in the Qur’an the man knows what he has done; in the experiment participants do not notice most of the reversals

Comparison (side A ↔ side B)	Point of contact (similarity)	Essential boundary
Augustine, Confessions, Book IV ↔ Plato, Apology 38a	One cannot take oneself as known in advance: “I became a great riddle to myself”, writes Augustine; Socrates speaks of daily “examining myself and others”	Augustine speaks of grief after a friend’s death and turns to God; Socrates speaks of philosophical conversation about virtue before a court; neither proposes a technique for testing generalisations, and that step is ours
Confucius, Analects II.4 ↔ Gospel of Luke 15:17	A life told as a path, in stages or through a turn	Confucius sums up the Master’s gradual self-cultivation, without a crisis; the parable, in its Gospel context, speaks of repentance and return to the father; these are different forms and aims, not one teaching
The Questions of King Milinda, Book II, ch. 1 ↔ Lind, 2023	The name and the story of oneself come from others: a name is “a designation in common use”, held by a shared language, and identity “a co-authored process”	In the Milinda this belongs to the Buddhist teaching that there is no permanent individuality; Lind’s is an opinion article without new data on the social setting of narrative, written in the context of personality disorders and making no metaphysical claims

The table compares only the passages cited. A shared motif does not mean a shared teaching, and we claim no historical link between the traditions. The studies give sample averages, and Lind’s article is an opinion; applying them to an individual calls for caution.

Primary sources

The traditional texts were read in English translations of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, in copies from Project Gutenberg and archive.org; the research articles are open under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licences. Quotations are given verbatim from these translations and articles; the Gospel verse is quoted from the King James Version. The example is the authors’ own.

1. Augustine. The Confessions of St. Augustine, trans. E. B. Pusey (Project Gutenberg #3296). Book IV (the death of a friend; IV.4.9) and Book X (memory; X.8.14). Chapter numbers follow the usual Latin division: the copy has none.

2. Montaigne, M. de. Essays of Michel de Montaigne — Complete, trans. Charles Cotton, ed. W. C. Hazlitt (Project Gutenberg #3600). Book II, ch. XVIII “Of Giving the Lie”, the paragraph on the book and its author.

3. Plato. Apology, trans. B. Jowett (Project Gutenberg #1656). 38a (the copy has no Stephanus numbers), the speech on the penalty.

4. The Chinese Classics, vol. 1: Confucian Analects, trans. J. Legge (Project Gutenberg #4094). Book II, ch. IV, 1–6.

5. The Koran, trans. J. M. Rodwell (Project Gutenberg #2800). Sura LXXV “The Resurrection”, verses 2 and 13–15 in the standard numbering (Rodwell gives no verse numbers).

6. The King James Bible (Project Gutenberg #10). Luke 15:10–22.

7. The Questions of King Milinda, Part I, trans. T. W. Rhys Davids (Sacred Books of the East, vol. XXXV, 1890; OCR copy on archive.org). Book II, ch. 1, 1 [Trenckner p. 25], SBE p. 40: the passage on the name, without the chariot simile.

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Tags

Self-story, story about oneself, autobiographical narrative, narrative identity, autobiographical memory, generalisations about oneself, “always” and “never”, specific memories, overgeneral memories, testing generalisations, explanation after the fact, choice blindness, false memories, other people’s testimony, narrative coherence, self-continuity, nostalgia, expressive writing, writing about oneself, co-authored identity, family stories, master narratives, reinterpretation, embellishment, parable of the prodigal son, coming to oneself, Augustine, Confessions, Montaigne, Essays, Socrates, Apology, Confucius, Analects, Qur’an, The Questions of King Milinda.

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