

Elizabeth Rando

Professor Emerson

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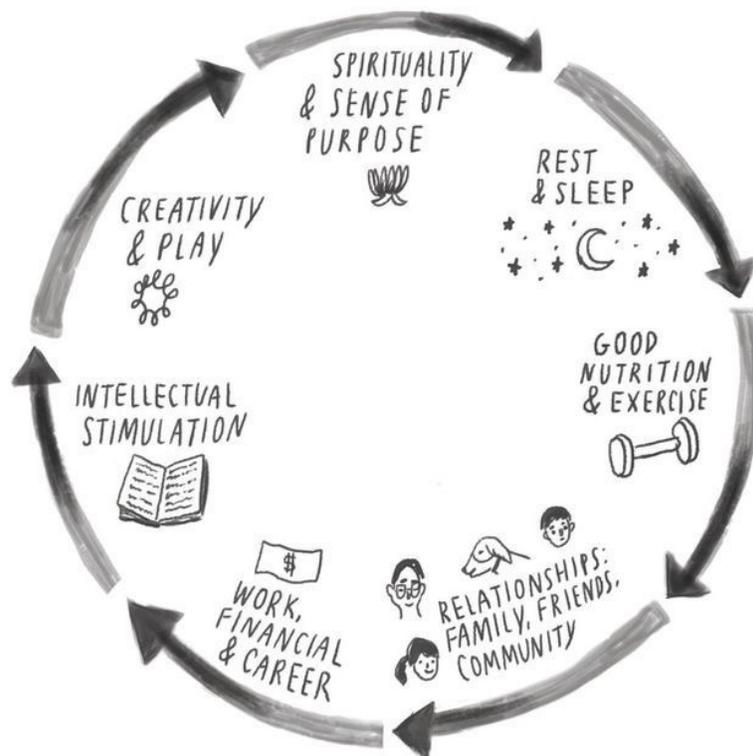


Define Life.

In broad terms, life is summarized as the property or quality that distinguishes the living from the nonliving (“Life”). But if the scope in which we viewed this term was narrowed, life could also be defined as the entirety of the existence of a single human being: every moment, every memory, and every story an individual has endured. So, the question arises, is it feasible to fit an entire human life into one single story? There is an abundance of controversy regarding this inquiry. Renowned authors, Julie Beck and Galen Strawson have contradictory opinions toward the subject. Each of their articles provided me with varying propositions regarding the notion and opened my mind to unaccustomed ideas. The judge of Sag Harbor, New York also surprised me by his answer when we asked how narrative influenced his life. Personally, I believe that narrative has played a powerful role in determining my identity.

Our lives are a collection of stories. Julie Beck is a senior editor for *The Atlantic*, which was also her platform for publishing her article, “Life’s Stories”. This account explains Beck’s perspective on how narrative does in fact aid in forming one’s identity. She examines how humans make sense of the world and where storytelling comes into play when doing so. Beck also suggests that how we tell and understand our own stories and those of others has a profound impact on our choices, health and overall attitude towards life. “Life’s Stories” taught me that “In telling the story of how you became who you are, and of who you’re on your way to becoming, the story itself becomes a part of who you are” (Beck). I had never considered this. After thinking it over, I realized that when I tell stories, even of something I had not myself experienced, I am giving my specific recount of what happened. Every person experiences the same situation in a different way. This is why I believe that each individual’s narrative is so important.

Life is not an easy concept to define in plain terms. “I am Not a Story” is a very opinionated article. Its author, Galen Strawson is known to many as the son of P. F. Strawson, an Oxford philosopher. Galen himself however, is an accomplished analytic philosopher and literary critic. In his article, he claims that there are two “types” of people. The Narrativists, who are “naturally disposed to experience or conceive of one’s life...in a narrative way, as having the form of a story, or perhaps a collection of stories, and - in some manner - to live in and through this conception” (Strawson). This is the type of person I would consider Julie Beck to be, as well as myself. Strawson, on the other hand is stiffly a non-Narrative. He believes that “life simply never assumes a story-like shape for us. And neither, from a moral point of view, should it” (Strawson). I find it interesting that Strawson is able to back up both views while so begrudgingly deny that any part of what Narrativists believe is true. Overall, I agree with Galen Strawson that human life is an impossibly complex web of memories and experiences.



However I have confidence in the fact that this web is a narrative itself and each radius aids in the forming and transforming of who we are as individuals.

Though Beck and Strawson's essays complicate one another's claim, there were valuable points to be taken from both. After reading each of these articles, our opinion could go either way, depending on who we are (who our narrative has helped us become). This is also the case for the interview of the judge in Sag Harbor, executed by both Patrick Lucyk and myself, that can be found by accessing the following webpage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNe9bxr07Hs&feature=youtu.be>. The interviewee, a man whose quality of life I someday aspire to reach, has had experiences most could not even fathom. When asked if his experiences had shaped him, he claimed that he had already been shaped, and these experiences were simply a part of him. I found this both confusing and fascinating.

In one way or another, the judge's assertion tied together everything that was mentioned in both articles and reflected my own perceptions about identity. I believe that each moment we live is another piece of our ever-growing narrative. I also believe that every decision we have made has led us to exactly where we are now, and that I am a Narrativist. After the interview, I was left wondering if this former policeman would have been a Narrativist or a non-Narrativist. However, for him and most others, I don't think there was a need to be put into a category. There was simply a story, a narrative. And that's all there needed to be to show someone who you are.

Works Cited

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