IDENTITY, LIFELONG LEARNING AND NARRATIVE – A THEORETICAL INVESTIGATION

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IDENTITY, LIFELONG LEARNING AND NARRATIVE
— A THEORETICAL INVESTIGATION

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In post-traditional societies, identity has been pervasively understood as a ‘thing’ one needs to and can endeavour to achieve or create. Many studies about identity in the humanities and social sciences have increasingly been approached in both reified and impersonal ways. These trends in understanding identity have made a significant impact on research into education and identity.

This thesis aims to demonstrate the complexity of personal identity on a theoretical level and endeavours to rethink the theoretical understanding of personal identity in relation to the notion of learning. Based on Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor’s theories of personal identity, this thesis argues that personal identity needs to be understood both as sameness and as selfhood at a conceptual level. Ontologically, the former belongs to the category of ‘thing’, ‘substance’ in terms of permanence in time. The latter belongs the category of ‘being’ in terms of permanence in time. This thesis will argue that this conceptual understanding of personal identity suggests that identity is largely ‘shaped’ by social, cultural, traditional, moral and ethical dimensions in the human world over time, rather than merely being a result of personal endeavour as an individual creation or/and an adaptation to constant social changes.

The moral and ethical dimensions of personal identity also suggest that the need for and ‘meaning’ of personal identity to a person in his/her life cannot be simply approached in an objective manner through impersonal terms. Rather, personal identity constitutively depends on self-interpretation, which highlights the role of narrative in understanding personal identity.
This thesis further argues that a new understanding about reflexive learning relevant to personal identity can be drawn from this theoretical understanding of personal identity and narrative. This new understanding is based on a person’s reflexivity not only in the dialectical frameworks between sameness, self and others, but also in different moral frameworks. What this presents us with is a different view of lifelong learning as an alternative to lifelong learning implied in the notion of a ‘reflexive project of the self’.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Identity and education

Over the past few decades, the topic of identity has been widely discussed in the field of education. Questions of teaching and learning in relation to identity have been studied through various approaches. In the last two decades, terms like ‘teacher identity’ and ‘learner identity’ appear in the practical field of teaching and learning in high frequency. The number of educational research projects related to the notion of identity is becoming increasingly large and the scope of such projects is extensive. As the Google search engine shows, during the period of 2000-2007, over 2,565 books and 433,000 articles in English on the topic of identity in the subject of education have been published. By the middle of 2008, the websites/webpages containing such key words as ‘identity, education and learning’ have reached nearly 17,300,000. Educational topics concerning identity cover school education, further education, higher education, special education and lifelong education/learning. The issues involved in the relationship between identity and education include personal development, social justice, culture, knowledge, power, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability and so forth. A journal titled Journal of Language, Identity and Education was even issued from 2002.

The rising interest in the topics of identity in educational field at least suggests that the studies of identity are becoming more fashionable in the field of theory and practice of education. Broadly speaking, it seems that education does have something to do with identity. For example, education takes a central role in personal development. The latter includes the formation, maintenance, management and construction of the sense of self, the personal identity, in a
person’s living world. Education as socialization takes a crucial part in the production and reproduction of particular identities and social roles. Education as the cultivation of being the human person is also fundamentally important in order for an individual to have personal meaning of life and self-definition. Teaching and learning increasingly play important roles in facing questions such as ‘Who am I?’, ‘Where do I come from?’, ‘Where will I go?’ and ‘How do I fit in?’, which are frequently posed in the increasingly changeable, transitory and pluralistic societies of the early 21st century.

It could be argued that the questions of education in respect of identity first of all have everything to do with the understanding of the notion of identity. This is because different approaches to identity from different disciplines that are applied to educational research might lead to very different outcomes. The diversified understanding of this notion can explain why the landscape of educational research in relation to identity seems to develop into a fragmented view with an extensive body of diversified literature. But, how to understand identity is a complex question. Linking this notion to the broad field of education adds further complexities. To demonstrate this notion’s complexity, I wish to present some different approaches to the study of identity by firstly discussing the fundamental question of the need of the notion of identity in practical world. Then, I will move on to a description of how this notion is approached theoretically in a historical context.

1.2 Identity in the practical world/society

Do we need identity? Most people would answer ‘yes’, since everyone needs a name in order that he/she can be identified by others. We assume that identity is something that we use to show others ‘who I am’ in our daily life and in the highly complicated societies today. It is not difficult to see how questions of
identity in our age pervasively concern practical issues. A government recognizes a person’s citizenship by his/her ID Card; a foreign Immigration Officer knows a person’s national identity by checking his/her visa; a bank identifies a person as a customer by checking his/her Credit Card; universities requires a student to offer his/her student card number to register in every new academic year, access to computer network and borrow books in university libraries. Also, a diversity of organizations and clubs create many identities of membership in order to offer privilege to their members. So, identity seems to be an important ‘thing’ everyone needs to have. Lack of identity seems to lead to difficulties in our daily life. However, if we examine the notion of identity from its history, we will find it is fundamentally a theoretical construct.

1.3 Identity on the theoretical level

The topic of identity on the theoretical level embraces many domains. Although the study of this notion is originally confined to the field of philosophy, the rising interest in this notion has been expanded to a myriad of disciplines like sociology, psychology, linguistics, arts, anthropology, politics and so forth. The rising interest in this topic among authors in different fields reflects the fact that there might be certain current issues about identity both on the theoretical level and the empirical level. Those issues seem to deserve attentions from a multitude of disciplines in social sciences and humanities. This has lead to the multi-dimensions and complexity of the notion of identity which result in an extensively growing body of literature on this topic. To demonstrate the complexities of this domain, I wish to present a brief overview of theories of identity in the three main disciplines in the studies of identity: philosophy, psychology and sociology.
1.3.1 Philosophical approaches to identity

The word ‘identity’ can be traced back to its origin in the 16th century. Originally, by definition, the term is not applied to a person as it is pervasively used today. Rather, it is initially a theoretical construct that was introduced to ‘do’ something in the field of philosophy. According to The Oxford English Dictionary, ‘identity’ appeared as ‘idemptitie’ in 1570, meaning ‘the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness’ (see OED [Online version] 2008). The British Philosopher John Locke introduced the term ‘identity’ in 1694 in an essay titled ‘Identity and Diversity’ in his work ‘An Essay concerning Human Understanding’ (Locke 1964[1694]). He defines identity as sameness of a thing with itself, through comparing this thing with itself over time (in different places), in contrast with the notion of diversity. As he argues, ‘When therefore we demand whether anything be the same or no, it refers always to something that existed such a time in such a place, which it was certain at that instant, was the same with itself’ (ibid., p.207 cited in Ricoeur 1992, p.125). One can therefore infer from this that sameness is actually a theoretical construct/concept of relation, and is also a relation among relations. This relation is expressed in mathematics and logic by the ‘equals’ sign, ‘=’. But identity is distinguished among relations by being the only logical relation, which means that ‘rules governing the use of “=” are counted among

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the rules of inference’. (Flew & Priest 1984, p.186). So, although the relation of identity is an equivalence relation, it is ‘distinguished from other equivalence by having the further property of licensing substitutions’ (ibid.). That is to say, if \(a\) is identical with \(b\), then any property of \(a\) is property of \(b\), or whatever is true of \(a\) is true of \(b\). This principle is known as Leibniz’s Law (see ibid.). Conversely, if \(a\) and \(b\) are identical in all respects, that is, if \(a\) has every property that \(b\) has, and \(b\) has every property that \(a\) has, then \(a\) and \(b\) are identical objects. This is called the principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, the term first coined by Leibniz in 1716 (see ibid.).

The nature of these principles is not without difficulties and issues, and they are still debatable in philosophy today. However, the originality of this notion suggests that, fundamentally, identity should be understood as a theoretical construct and has been introduced to see whether or not something is either identical to itself or something else. For example, Wagner defines identity as ‘the relation each thing bears just to itself’, i.e., \(a = a\). Furthermore the identity of two objects or ideas is constituted by their sharing of all properties (see Wagner 1999, p.415), that is, \(a = b\). We can also see, this theoretical construct is not created for its own sake, rather, it is introduced to ‘do’ very particular things; for example to represent certain relation in logic and mathematics, to address the philosophical problem of permanence over time of substance and so on.

However, identity in this tradition seems to address identity as ‘things-being-identical’ and has less to do with identity of the person. Given that the latter is the central focus of this thesis, we need to have a closer look at the notion of identity of person or personal identity in philosophy. When Locke firstly applied the notion of identity to ‘person’, he still used his original
definition of ‘identity’, that is, sameness (of a person) with oneself. But instead of focusing on same body, his definition of personal identity seems to focus on same continued consciousness, or one’s same instantaneous reflection extended through time as the same memory (see Ricoeur 1992, p.125-126). Despite of his disregard of body as the criteria of personal identity, the sameness of oneself in Locke’s idea can still be understood as a ‘thing’ with which one can be identified and re-identified by oneself over time. This historical investigation at least also shows that the ‘sameness with oneself’ can be seen as the original meaning of the concept of personal identity in philosophy.

However, David Hume questions the existence of personal identity and contends it is an illusion. As an empiricist, he requires that for every idea there must be a corresponding impression. He argues,

‘For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, or heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself at any time without a perception, and can never observe any thing but the perception’ (Hume 2000 [1739], p.165 emph. in original).

Hence Hume casts doubts on the notion of personal identity. He argues that each of us is ‘nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement’ (ibid.).

Following this tradition, personal identity becomes the concept posing philosophical problems in dealing with what it means to say that this person at this time is the same person as that person at that time. Many problems relating to personal identity in this tradition have been debated, for example, controversies relating to the criteria of personal identity, the question of
persistence of a person from one time to another, what matters in personal identity and so on. In the Western history of philosophy, many thinkers have grappled with these questions until the modern age. For example, Derek Parfit, who approached the notion of personal identity from his ‘Reductionist view’, argues that ‘personal identity consists in an additional fact in relation to physical and/or mental continuity’ (Parfit 1986 cited in Ricoeur 1992, p 131). In his view, persons are nothing more than our brains and our bodies. But he argues that personal identity cannot be reduced to either, which leads to his conclusion that the puzzling cases of personal identity (i.e., what should be the criteria to decide a person’s identity: consciousness or body?) cannot be decided. Thus, Parfit claims that personal identity is not what matters. His claim will not surprise us if we realize that his idea of personal identity is still based on the classical sense in terms of ‘sameness’. To Parfit, identity can be fully described impersonally: there need not be a determinate answer to the question ‘Will the person that continues to exist remain to be me?’

Later on, many schools of Western philosophical thoughts influenced the notion of personal identity in history. In the pre-modern age of the Western world, identity on the social and the cultural levels are generally understood as something that is passively given to a person from one’s birth to death; for example, ancestral title, family business, local tradition, social role, social class and so on. Under the influence of the Enlightenment and with the advocacy of human reason, the new idea that personal identity can be fashioned through one’s self emerges. The notion of identity turned towards the evolvement of cognition and the use of reason and agency can be ascribed to several important philosophers. Decartes’s separation of mind and body, gives an independent position to subjectivity; Locke’s stress on reflexive capacity of the mind helps the formation of a ‘sovereign subject’, or ‘human agent who is able
to remake himself [sic] by methodical and disciplined action’ (Taylor 1989, p.159). This approach towards thinking about subjectivity was elaborated by Emmanuel Kant through his notion of Enlightenment. He describes the Enlightenment as ‘man’s [sic] release from his self-incurred tutelage’ and defines tutelage as ‘man’s [sic] inability to make use of his understanding without direction form another’ (Kant 1992 [1784], p.90 cited in Biesta 2006b, p.3). This enabled him articulate the ‘motto’ of Enlightenment as ‘Sapere aude!’ (‘Have courage to exercise your own understanding!’) (ibid.). Hence, Kant actually calls for an autonomous subjectivity underpinned by rationality. As Biesta explains, Kant’s idea of using one’s own understanding/free thinking/independent judgement concerns rational autonomy, i.e. autonomy based on one’s own reason, and this human capacity for Kant ‘was an inherent part of human nature’ (see Biesta 2006b, p.3). For Kant, ‘the propensity for free thinking could only be brought about through education’ (ibid.). Biesta argues that the modern education can be seen as a task of bringing out or releasing such inherent human nature (see ibid., p.4). This situation comes about through the intertwining of the Enlightenment and the tradition of Bildung (i.e. the tradition concerning the question of what constitutes an educated or cultivated human being) that has laid the foundation for modern education (see ibid. p.3). The tradition of the Enlightenment has made a profound impact on modern educational theory and practice. As Biesta argues,

‘Education became understood as the process that helps people to develop their rational potential so that they can become autonomous, self-directing individualist, while rationality became the modern marker of what it means to be human’ (ibid. p.4).

Modern education has been seen as the creation and/or production of subjectivities as rational autonomous persons. For example, as seen in
cognitive and moral development, in liberal education, in critical thinking as an educational ideal and in democratic education (see ibid., p.127-128). Following this tradition, being a ‘human’ person or ‘educated person’ becomes normatively understood as developing or having a ‘rational autonomous subjectivity’. Hence, if education is seen as an insertion of a pre-existing system, or as a creation or production of identities and social roles for societies, or even as a self-cultivation of being a human person, then a ‘normal’ person or ‘educated person’ should be a person who can be identified by him/herself and/or by others as a subjectivity with the character of rational autonomy. Alternatively perhaps we can say, someone with a personal identity should be the one who is characteristic of rational autonomy. And ever since the rise of Enlightenment, cultivating a kind of subjectivity characterized by rational identity comes to be one of the central tasks of modern education.

In the first half of 19th century, the Romantic Movement approached the notion of identity by advocating the notion of individuality. Advocating expressing some innate part of the self through sensibility and feeling and being in harmony with ‘Nature’, Romanticism is a movement that is anti-empiricism which promotes expressive individualism and natural-fulfilment of the self. Also, Romantic expressivism requires the individual to take responsibility for one’s destiny. This movement had a deep influence on the Western world and some theorists consider that we can even find its essence in the modern view of identity as the ‘project of the self’ (see Benwell & Stokoe 2006, p.20).

During the dawn of the 20th century studies relating to the identity of the person gradually emerged in social sciences, particularly in psychology and sociology, coming to develop into a main research trend in social sciences in the second half of the last century.
1.3.2 Psychological approaches to identity

Many studies concerning identity in psychology can at least be traced back to the psychoanalytic tradition. Working on the internal functions of the subjectivity, the psyche, the core of the self, the founder of psychoanalysis, Freud developed three components of personality structure: ‘id’, ‘ego’ and ‘superego’ (Goldenson 1984). The id (from Latin, meaning ‘it’)

‘is a reservoir of energy derived from instincts, governed by the pleasure principle, and its contents are unconscious, some being innate and others derived from experience but submerged by repression, and it is in constant conflict with the ego and the superego, both of which originate from it during the course of development’ (Colman 2001, p.365).

The ego (from Latin, meaning ‘I’) ‘is largely conscious part of the mind, governed mainly (though not exclusively) by the reality principle, mediating between external reality, the id, and the superego’ (ibid., p.233). In his book ‘The Ego and the Id’ (1923), Freud described its role as follows,
'It owes service to three masters and is consequently menaced by three dangers: from the external world, from the libido of the id and from the severity of the superego’ (Standard Edition, XIX, pp.12-66, at p.56 cited in Colman 2001, p.233).

The superego ‘originates from a conflict between the id and the ego in the course of development’ and ‘monitors and controls the ego like a judge or a censor’ (Colman 2001, p.724). Freud has even used the term ‘inner identity’ and Erikson interpreted it as ‘identity of something in the individual’s core with an essential aspect of a group’s inner coherence’ (Eriskon 1980, p.109).

Freud’s psychoanalytical theories pave the way to the studies of identity in developmental psychology. Based on Freud’s notion of ‘ego’, Erikson coins the term ‘ego identity’ in one of his papers published in 1946 (ibid., p.22). In this paper, he writes,

‘ego identity concerns more than the mere fact of existence, as conveyed by personal identity; it is the ego quality of this existence...Ego identity, in its subjective aspect, is the awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego’s synthesizing methods and that methods are effective in safeguarding the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others’ (ibid.).

As Côté and Levine suggest, ego identity ‘refers to the “identity of the ego”, and that the ego is the personality agency responsible for behavioural, cognitive, and emotional control’ (Côté and Levine 2002, p.94). Realising trauma suffered by American victims after the Second World War, Erikson argues that people sometimes experience ‘identity crisis’ (Erikson 1968) when they lose a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity (see Côté and
Levine 2002, p.95). Later, Erikson’s view of ‘identity crisis’ becomes the experiences of ‘severely conflicted young people whose sense of confusion is due to a war within themselves, and in confused rebels and destructive delinquents who war on their society’ (Erikson 1968, p.17 cited in Côté and Levine 2002, p.95).

In other words, it is a period of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself. Meanwhile, Erikson links his writings to identity problems of adulthood. Although Erikson’s notion of ego identity focuses on psychosocial development, it also stresses the ‘subjective’ sense of ego and is labelled as ‘felt’ identity (see Goffman 1990[1963], p.129). Erikson also acknowledges social, cultural, normative and historical dimensions in his argument on identity formation and maintenance (see Côté & Levine 2002, p.14-19, 94).

Côté and Levine have also argued that, in the field of psychology, the tradition of the study of the ‘formation of identity’ during the transition from adolescence to adulthood originates from and is influenced by Erikson’s psychoanalytical approach (Côté & Levine 2002, p.14). This approach is mainly applied in the realm of developmental psychology. For example, James Marcia (1964, 1966) developed his ‘identity status paradigm’ based on Erikson’s early writings on ‘the American identity’. This paradigm is an elaboration on the notion of ‘ego identity’, and assumed that ‘the formation of identity’ might experience four identity statuses. Thus this paradigm categorized identity into a four-categories typology based on individual choice making in youth and adolescence. The work included an intensive study on variations in the presence or absence of choice-making and commitments. Later, these four
categories were further developed to produce many sub-categories.

‘Identity status is theorized to vary hierarchically regarding levels of maturity of self-regulation and complexity of social functioning. Each status has been empirically associated with personality characteristics and social behaviours, and these characteristics tend to reflect this hierarchy’ (Marcia 1993 summarized in Côté & Levine 2002, p.19).

A large number of empirical research programmes focusing on the measurement of identity status have been conducted and numerous approaches to ‘identity formation’ in this psychological field have been developed from this paradigm (see Côté & Levine 2002, p.18-20).

Another important approach to identity in psychology is the tradition of self-psychology (see Côté and Levine 2002, p. 14). This field chiefly focuses on the ideas of how notions of self and self-concept can be understood as cognitive organization and process that enable persons to maintain their identities in interactive contexts. But self is a complex concept. This field has developed a large number of related concepts, such as self-image, self-esteem, self-enhancement, self-analysis, etc., which makes the ‘self’ largely multifaceted. The early writing on self in psychology is rooted in the pioneering psycho-philosophical writings of early American pragmatists (e.g. James 1948 [1892]; Cooley 1902; Mead 1900-1925, 1934). These works conceptualised self as a product of social interaction. Cooley is generally credited as the first interactionist and developed his social theory of self through the metaphor of the image of a looking-glass self (see Shrauger & Schoeneman 1999, p.26). He assumes that there is a shared awareness between individuals, which implies that we ‘live in the mind of others’ (see Cooley 1902). Cooley argues that we develop our concepts of self from seeing how
others respond to us—we see our ‘self’ through the mind of others. As he wrote,

‘In the presence of one whom we feel to be of importance, there is a tendency to enter into and adopt, by sympathy, his judgment of ourself’ (Cooley 1902, p.175).

According to Cooley, the individual is not independent of the social aspect; both are aspects of the same process of interaction.

Mead is one of the early social psychologists in the American pragmatic tradition and his thoughts are regarded as the main source of inspiration for symbolic interactionism though this claim is still contested (see Biesta 1998, p.75; 1999, p.478; see also Joas, 1989 p.235, n.38). But according to Biesta, at least his early writings (1900-1925) show that ‘reflective consciousness – which encompasses both conscious reflection and self-consciousness – implies a social situation as its precondition’ (Biesta 1998). This suggests that ‘for Mead intersubjectivity, i.e., that which “happens” between human beings, precedes subjectivity and is constitutive of it’ (Biesta 1998, p.91, see also Biesta 1999). Following Mead’s thoughts, self can be seen as process and object in social interaction. According to Mead, there is no sense of self at birth. The individual is not conscious of himself or herself as an object from the inside out, rather, he/she sees himself/herself through the ‘eyes’ of others. Mead describes self as the process of conduct formation between ‘I’ and ‘Me’. The first phase of self is ‘I’, which is impulsive to a situation. When an individual’s adjustment to a situation is disturbed in the first phase, the second phase of the self, the ‘Me’, which is conscious, comes into play. Before responding to a situation, the ‘Me’ will consider and plan to regulate his/her action and choose the best way to respond to the situation. The ‘Me’, then, to some extent, is the
‘I’ that is conscious and is the ‘self’ that is ‘socialized’ by ‘others’. Thus the individual experiences himself and becomes an object to him/herself ‘only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behaviour in which both he and they are involved’ (Mead 1934, p.138).

The concept of self nowadays seems to be much more elaborated and diversified. It has been defined as an important cognitive concept and memory structure (e.g. Andersen, Glassman & Gold 1998; Catrambone, Beike & Neidenthal 1996). The self-concept also appears to be a cognitive construction developed in the course of social interaction and experiences as a group member (e.g. Brewer & Hewstone 2004, p.xi). Some theorists also study self-concept from a broad cross-cultural perspective rather than only in Western cultural tradition (e.g. Bond 1988; Markus & Kitayama 1991; Oyserman 2004). Contrastingly, Bruner’s discussion emanates from a history of the notion of self. He argues that there is a shift from ontological questions about the ‘conceptual self’ to the ‘epistemological’ concern of it, that is, from ‘essentialist’ and ‘realist’ self to its ‘transactional’ construction (see Bruner 1990, p.100). But Kenneth Gergen claims that in a postmodern age, self has become a ‘saturated self’. As he argues,

‘Emerging technologies saturate us with the voices of humankind – both harmonious and alien. As we absorb their varied rhymes and reasons, they become part of us and we of them. Social saturation furnished us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self’ (Gergen 1991, p.6-7 cited in Côté & Levine 2002, p.26)

However, self is different from identity, more precisely, different from the identity of the person, though both are related. It could be argued that identity
can be understood partly as a constructed dimension of the self and partly as an individual’s identification of the self as an ‘object’. But, identity in this field seems to be generally described as ‘the sense of self’. Baumeister (1998) categorizes a self-psychology field as three traditions: reflexive consciousness, the interpersonal self, and the executive functions of the self. This categorization of the landscape of self-psychology today suggests the study of identity in this field seems to focus on intrapsychic domain (see Côté & Levine 2002). These approaches to the self can be reflected in many definitions of identity. For example, Brewer & Hewstone think identity refers to ‘the content of self-knowledge as it is represented to and by others’ (see Brewer & Hewstone 2004, p.xi). Rainwater (1989) maintains that self-identity is a reflexive project that one can control and achieve.

In the second half of the 20th Century, there was a rising interest in ‘collective identities’ in psychological and socio-psychological fields. One of widely discussed theories is Tajfel and Turner’s Social Identity Theory (SIT). Tajfel (1981) asserts that, ‘identity represents the conceptual link between individual and the society as a whole’. This approach is characterized as referring to a group label and categorization in understanding identity. SIT theory contends that a person does not just have a ‘personal self’, but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. The process of social categorisation is a social-cognitive process of membership. The difference between ‘ingroup’ and ‘outgroup’ is defined in a relative or flexible way that is subject to the activities one is engaged in. Different social contexts may cause an individual to think, feel and act on the basis of his personal, family or national ‘level of self’ (see Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social Identity Theory posits that group membership is an important component of one’s identity and that individuals are motivated to view their groups as positive and distinct from
other groups. In recent years, some theories have challenged the view of identity as essential, permanent and unified quality of group categories. As Benwell & Stokoe (2006) argue, some theories that challenged ‘group’ identity can be found in poststructuralist and sociolinguistic theories. Such theories approach the notion of identity by linking it with the notions like diaspora (see Hall 1995, p.48) and hybridity (see Bhabha 1994).³

1.3.3 Sociological approaches to identity⁴

Côté and Levine (2002) have suggested that the foundation of sociological approaches to identity is chiefly governed by five sociological traditions (see also Weigert et al 1986). In this section, while following Côté & Levine in describing these traditions, I will insert some of my own understandings of related works of and approaches to identity. According to Côté & Levine (2002), the first two traditions are rooted in theoretical perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, a term first used by Herbert Blumer (1969), based on Mead’s thoughts. The first tradition was developed by the Chicago School of Symbolic Interactionism. This tradition is noted for its qualitative investigations and assumes that social reality is to be understood from a nominalist perspective. Therefore such thinking requires continual negotiation to maintain adequate definitions of situations. Its fundamental ontological assumption is that social reality is continually created by humans through the names and meanings


they attach to things (i.e., symbols) when communicating with each other (i.e. during interactions). Identities are constructed and modified through these ongoing processes. Erving Goffman, following Mead’s thoughts, famously discussed ego identity, personal identity and social identity in *Stigma* (Goffman 1990[1963]). His work was based on his notion of the self, i.e., self in the process of day-to-day social interaction. But he is best known for his detailed analyses of management of identity in day-to-day social encounters (Goffman 1959). Hewitt (2000) also argues because of the emergent nature of social reality, identities are considered to be precarious and in need of continual management (see Côté and Levine 2002, p.33).

The second tradition is categorized as The Iowa School of Symbolic Interactionism which was developed by Manfrred Kuhn during 1950s.

‘Its ontological and epistemological assumptions are polar opposites to those of Chicago School, favouring quantitative methodologies and realist assumptions about the self (i.e. that it can be considered fixed, relatively stable, and therefore reliably measured as opposed to being precarious, in need of continual reconstruction, and open only to introspection)’ (Côté & Levine 2002, p.34).

The third tradition is the Sociology of Knowledge and Interpretive Sociology. This tradition is demonstrated in the work titled *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckmann 1966). This often-cited work among contemporary social constructionists is actually the statement of ‘pragmatic social constructionism’ and social epistemology (Weigert et al., 1986). The key to understanding pragmatic constructionism is to note that social constructions create higher order realities that are nonreducible to individual constructions because they take on an ‘existence’ of their own through the process of ‘objectivation’. Consequently, identities are both subjective and objective:
they are nominalist in the sense that they are derived from and negotiated within social constructions, but can have very real consequences for human welfare and survival (see Côté & Levine 2000, p.37).

Côté and Levine (2000) further suggest that the fourth tradition is The Structural-functionalist Tradition. Identity in this tradition is defined in terms of the interplay between self and social structure. This tradition rooted in Emile Durkheim’s classical formulations (e.g. Durkheim 1964[1893]) and its main proponent was Talcott Parsons (e.g. Parsons 1968). Structural-functionalists assert that societies comprise interdependent subsystems whose functions contribute to the maintenance of social order and continuity. This perspective begins with macro-sociological propositions and contends that identity is shaped by the institutional structures of society, which means each individual is given a social role. The strength of the functionalist perspective lies in its recognition of a level of structural analysis irreducible to the level of individuals or psychic process. The structure-agency debate can be seen as a big issue emerged from this tradition and psychological tradition.

The fifth tradition is Critical Theory approach to identity. Côté & Levine (2002) argue that this approach, which proposes there is a sociological stock of knowledge in respect of identity, was largely developed through Jürgen Habermas’s endeavour. As Weigert et al write,

‘Habermas (1974) strove to formulate a theoretical version of social evolution and personal development based on underlying homologies between the two process. He sees social identity evolving from primitive mythic and kinship foundations to contemporary rational and communicative relationships. Within this overall scheme, he tries to integrate contemporary psychoanalytic, sociological, and
developmental psychology perspectives on individual identity into a synthetic and normative argument for a sense of identity based on communicative competence, rationality and tolerance—a universal pragmatics (1979). Habermas offers a historically grounded perspective with an emancipatory interest and normative thrust for analyzing identity’ (Weigert et al.1986, p.25 cited in Côté & Levine 2002, p.38)

Following Côté and Levine (2002), I think we can add one further approach to the sociological studies of identity. This is a late/post modernist perspective in sociology, appropriate given the popularity of this approach to identity in current time. However I will reconstruct the argument in an alternative manner. The question of identity today has become a significant issue that has been the subject of much controversy. One pervasive view in analysing why identity has become an issue is that, in comparison with pre-modern ages, rapid changes within current society and the decline of fixed frameworks caused by modernity create radical changing conditions. This view further advocates that the rapid changes of society and the decline of fixed frameworks not only change one’s personal life and the self, but also tend to change the way a person feels the sense of selfhood. Many sociologists particularly hold this view and they examine the questions of identity by linking it with the transformations in social structure (e.g. Giddens 1990, 1991, Beck 1992, Bauman 2000). Following The Structural-Functionalist Tradition in sociology (e.g., Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and Parsons) and holding a position between macro structure and micro self, sociologist Anthony Giddens approaches identity by analysing the interplay between modern institutions and the self in current age (see Giddens 1991). Giddens analyses that in post-traditional society, identity is no longer ‘given’ from the outside. Rather, in what he calls ‘late modern’ society, the reference points for the construction of the self seem to have to be set from the inside of the self. Hence, identity
tends to be understood as an individual’s ‘endeavour’ (see Giddens 1991, p.5), a ‘reflexive project of the self’ (ibid, p.244), and a personal ‘achievement’ (ibid., p.215) achieved through the personal narrative(s) of one’s life.

For postmodernists, ‘the notion of “lifestyle” and “image”, and the proliferation and circulation of the latter through the media, are the means by which an identity, a self-image, is constructed’ (Edwards 1997, p.43). This tradition holds that in a society filled with rapid changes and uncertainties, the ‘emphasis on images and illusions is reflected in great attention to self-presentation and to style over substance’ (Gecas & Burke 1995, p.57 cited in Côté & Levine 2002, p.41). Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues that identity has become an ‘unfulfilled project’ in a society characterized as ‘liquid modernity’, given one’s constant desires to have new identity, accompanied by countless choices and possibilities of one’s lifestyles (Bauman 2000, p.28-29). Although both Giddens and Bauman agree that rapid social changes induced by modernity cause great ‘anxieties’ of the self and produce identity problems, they do not agree on the degree of the social changes happened in our age.

1.4 The need of further exploration

It would seem apparent from this brief overview, at least in my understanding, that there is a need to conduct a further exploration into personal identity on a conceptual level and into the need of personal identity for a subject. First of all, one can at least realize that the notion of identity has developed into a complex and multi-dimensional notion over time. Different approaches have been applied to this notion for further study and various approaches have led to different understandings of identity. However, there appears to be a growing trend towards treating this notion in a radically specialized and reified manner, particularly within the social science. Many traditions have largely ignored the
theoretical weight of the notion of identity. For example, the Identity Status Paradigm operationalizes identity in terms of degrees of conscious choice-making (exploration) about commitments to various domains of values and functioning. Furthermore it is used to precisely represent the resolution of identity stages, something which Erikson considers as a normative phenomenon. Also, the Self-psychological tradition seems to conceptualize self mainly by focusing on the intrapsychic domain and has produced an extensive number of fragmented literature and terms on self. Recent sociological approaches (e.g. Giddens 1991, Bauman 2000) to identity seem to suggest identity is a specific ‘thing’ one can ‘have’, can ‘choose to have’ and can ‘achieve’, ‘purchase’ and even ‘discard’. All these indicate that there is a need to clarify the question of ‘what’ identity really is on the theoretical level. It can be argued that this question needs to be investigated from a philosophical field of identity, since identity is originally a philosophical notion.

My second observation is that quite a few approaches to the studies of personal identity seem to be rather objective and impersonal. In the philosophical field, Parfit, for example, still seems to treat personal identity merely as identity in the sense of ‘things-being-identical’, and simply describes personal identity in impersonal language. In the field of psychology, particularly in developmental psychology, the study of identity increasingly seem to be treated like an object in physical science, which can be measured and observed in a detached manner with less reference to a subject’s social, cultural, and normative surroundings and their shaping on such a subject. In sociology, identity is mainly viewed from outside the subject by focusing on how structure and institutions shape one’s social roles and status within social stratification, and research in this tradition is mainly approached through large scale quantitative surveys. However, descriptions and interpretations about
identity offered by subjects are seldom held to be important. Personal identity as defined through Symbolic Interactionism is generally focused on the importance of ‘self-image’ in day-to-day life based on certain general social standards. This approach is concerned more with the general fact of social interaction of human beings than with human personhood. In these traditions, personal identity seems to be simply objectively described as sameness, continuity or traits of a physical thing or an objective phenomenon, which seems to suggest that the ‘person’ is basically just an objective ‘thing’ or ‘phenomenon’. Personal identity appears to have nothing to do with a person as social, political cultural, historical and ethical being. If personal identity is simply construed in an objective or impersonal sense, what is the point of linking the notion of personal identity to a person that cannot be reduced to a biological ‘thing’ or ‘phenomenon’?

What appears to be emerging is a fundamental philosophical question concerning personal identity. Does personal identity matter? But to ask ‘does personal identity matter’ is to ask ‘to whom does personal identity matter’. Of course, ‘personal identity’ matters to researchers like me, but it is simply in the sense of research interest. This is not what I mean. What I mean is that if personal identity as a notion has something to do with being a person himself/herself in the human world, working on the notion of personal identity cannot be simply confined to impersonal language. This question about personal identity particularly concerns the basic relationship between identity and education (and learning), if education (and learning) is concerned with the cultivation of the being as a human person. It is therefore important to explore the need for personal identity within the person, because this directly concerns the question of to what extent the understanding of personal identity is relevant to education and learning in terms of being a human person.
1.5 Theme of the research and how it was conducted

The bulk of this thesis is an endeavour to show how the notion of personal identity can be understood differently in relation to current mainstream views of identity in philosophy and social sciences. The thesis is based on my understanding and thinking of the works of several sociologists and philosophers. While this research will conduct a critical analysis of some sociologists’ view on identity, the main theme of this thesis will be a critical reconstruction of French philosopher Ricoeur’s work and Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor’s work on identity and narrative as well as an investigation of the role of learning in their identity theories. I will particularly have a look at the aspects of lifelong learning in my discussion of the role of learning by linking my discussion to both philosophers’ identity theories.

I start to investigate the question of why identity has become problematic in Western world in our age by reading the British sociologist Anthony Giddens’s work Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age (1991). It is a work that links sociological analysis with psychological analysis in understanding the interplay between self and society in the constitution of identity in post-traditional societies. I take this work as one important part of my discussion of identity, because I realized the fact that the notion of personal identity today is largely approached by both psychological and sociological analyses. Giddens’s analyses in this work provide me with certain sociological and psychological understandings about identity in today’s societies, or what he calls the ‘late modern’ societies. This work has been widely discussed and massively cited. It has also been frequently applied to many fields. Particularly it has influenced policies, theories and practices in the field of lifelong learning. In sum, one major part of my discussion concerns personal identity shaped by the interplay between the self and the society.
I also read sociologist Zygmunt Bauman’s work *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and *Identity* (2004), because I want to have a look at how the interplay between identity and society is examined by sociologists in a *postmodernist* perspective, since Giddens’s work only reflects a late modernist view. I also refer to the American sociologist Richard Sennett’s work *The Corrosion of Character: the Personal Consequence of Work in the New Capitalism* (1997) in order to understand how modern institutions exert negative impacts on personal character in a specific context, i.e., workplace. This work inspires me to reflect on the personal consequences of working flexibly in a modern capitalist society.

Rather than taking a sociological or psychological approach to the notion of personal identity, I wish to develop a different understanding of this notion from philosophical views. I will establish the theoretical rationale of my research, based on reconstruction and critical analysis of the works of Ricoeur and Taylor. Firstly this is because problems about personal identity are not simply psychological and/or sociological problems, but originally philosophical problems. Secondly, personal identity as a philosophical concept should not simply be understood in its original sense, since this is a philosophical concept that has changed and developed over time. Identity as a philosophical concept then needs to be investigated in the context of current theories as developed by modern philosophers in our age. Ricoeur and Taylor are two philosophers in our time who developed the theories of personal identity in a deep and systematic way against the historical background to this notion in philosophy. Thirdly, one common feature between two philosophers is that both of them put the notion of narrative into their discussion about the notion of identity. As I mentioned in my overview of different theories of identity, Giddens asserts that self-identity in late modern societies can only be
found in one’s ‘capacity to keep a particular narrative going’ (Giddens 1991, p.54, emph. in original), so I wish to examine how the relation between narrative and identity in Ricoeur’s and Taylor’s theories are relevant to and different from Giddens’s argument.

I studied Ricoeur’s work *Oneself as Another* (1992), because in this work he conducted a conceptual analysis of the notion of personal identity as a necessary step for him to argue for an ethical dimension to personal identity. I also studied part of his three-volume work titled *Time and Narrative* (1984, 1992). In addition, I study Taylor’s work *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity* (1989). I choose this work because in it Taylor provides a thorough argument for the need or importance of identity to the person by articulating the inescapable relationship between identity and the good in its broad moral sense.

1.6 A theoretical rationale

By following Ricoeur and Taylor’s works, I approach the notion of personal identity by analysing the constitution and nature of the concept of personal identity and by arguing for the need of this notion for a person on a conceptual level.

Personal identity as a concept, I would argue, is a theoretical construct, that is, an idea constructed by human minds. In this sense, it is not an objective phenomenon/thing like tree, mountain, or sheep and so on which exists there outside of human minds. However, ontologically, personal identity can be understood as a ‘thing’ in the sense of identity as ‘sameness of the person’. Such a view implies an objective phenomenon of ‘permanence in time’ of a substance (both on the material level and the immaterial level) — a ‘thing’,
'entity' with which one can be identified and re-identified by oneself and by others over time. This idea is drawn from Ricoeur’s conceptual analysis of personal identity. His analysis of personal identity distinguishes between identity as *sameness* (*idem*-identity) and identity as *selfhood* (*ipse*-identity). This is a response to the problematic nature of personal identity in terms of criteria for personal identity. This analysis suggests that personal identity can be seen as selfsameness, i.e. *both* as sameness, an ‘entity’, a ‘thing’ ontologically, and as selfhood, a ‘being’, the ‘existence of a person in the world’. I will take this analysis as a point of departure for my studies on personal identity and its relation to learning and narrative. I will further define identity as being in two senses: being in ‘moral space’ by following Taylor and being in ethical relationships with others by following Ricoeur.

The significance of the notion of personal identity therefore can be understood in two senses in terms of a ‘thing’ and a ‘being’. First, as Taylor suggests, identity is that we concern and we need to find and/or discover in a ‘moral space’, and in this sense, identity can be seen as a ‘thing’ and such a thing is a ‘meaning’ of one’s life. Having and maintaining such a meaning defines what is important and what is not in our life. It is this meaning of life that defines the mode of our life and the kind of person we want to be in a human world, hence our identity. Without such meaning, we would feel disoriented in our life and suffer ‘identity-crisis’. By articulating such meaning, we would be empowered to live up to the goods we strongly value. Second, personal identity is significant also because it is about the presence of our unique *being* on the moral level and the ethical level in the human world. Personal identity is about a mode of ‘moral being’ that one cares about, which exists in the ‘moral space’ of human world. Identification of such ‘moral being’ can be understood as a history of such being vis-à-vis one’s strongly valued good in
the ‘moral space’. Also, personal identity is about a mode of ‘ethical being’, because such a kind of being presents itself in the way he/she responds to others in the intersubjective world. For example from the act of keeping one’s words to others, one can recognize an individual identity as permanence through time that others can count on. These two senses of personal identity are important in that they concern the notion of ‘personhood’, that is, the quality or condition of being a person, rather than simply being a person in the biological sense. I will regard these understandings of the notion of personal identity as the theoretical rationale of this thesis.

The second focus for this thesis is the notion of learning. In Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories of identity, I find informative discussions on narrative in relation to personal identity. I therefore conduct a detailed analysis of the role of narrative plays in understanding identity. Then, I draw together my thoughts about learning from my reconstruction of the notion of personal identity and my analysis of the importance of narrative in their theories. In doing this, I refer to some works on learning and lifelong learning. I particularly cite the book Theory and Practice of Learning (Jarvis al et. 2003) and Gert Biesta’s work Beyond Learning (2006). These works not only help me grasp an understanding about the landscape of learning and lifelong learning, but also enable me to form my way of defining my notion of learning in this thesis. John Field’s work Lifelong Learning and the New Educational Order (2000) and Richard Edwards’s work Changing places? Flexibility, lifelong learning and a learning society (1997) also provide me with an overview of the policies and practice of lifelong learning in the past few decades in the Western societies. These works help me conduct an ongoing discussion on personal identity and learning, with particular attention to lifelong learning.
1.7 Aims and contribution

My research aim is then to try to formulate different views on the notion of personal identity, examine the role of narrative in understanding personal identity and analyse whether narrative and learning is related in this domain. I will clarify the complexity of personal identity on a theoretical level and develop a different theoretical understanding of this notion in the field of education and learning. I also endeavour to articulate the need and ‘meaning’ of personal identity for a person in his/her life. I hope that through using my theoretical rationale, I can contribute a new theory of learning that is relevant to personal identity and demonstrate how learning can be drawn from narrative identity, with particular attentions to the aspects of lifelong learning.

1.8 Overview of the structure of the thesis

In Chapter 2, I attempt to find the answers to the question why identity has become a problem in Western modern societies in the second half of the last century. I do this by focusing on theories of two British leading sociologists: Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman. I first seek to understand the notion of ‘modernity’ and ‘modernization’, and then shift to the question of how modernity and modernization related to the self. Giddens analyses that the dynamism of institutions of modernity causes new anxieties, dangers and opportunities to the self. New risks and dangers are created. These risks emerge in terms of the existential questions of an individual’s being in the world, through his/her trust of the disembedding mechanism of modernity, though securities (certainties) and new possibilities are also created in this process. Media as a product of modernity are both expressions and instruments of the disembedding mechanism and globalising tendencies of modernity from which no one can escape. With the decline of traditions and fixed structures, under the conditions of reflexivity of modernity and rapid
social changes, the self also becomes ‘the reflexive project of the self’. By the same token, ‘self-identity is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography’ (Giddens 1991, p.244). Giddens therefore asserts that the choices of lifestyles and life-planning are increasingly significant to the constitution of self-identity in late modern settings.

I then move my discussion to Bauman’s arguments about issues of identity. For him, problems of identity are caused by radical individualization. Identity has shifted from ‘given’ to an ‘unfulfilled project’ that one has to perform and an individual has to take responsibility for this task with no public place to address personal problems. All these situations bring agony to the modern person in Bauman’s view. After presenting some criticisms on Giddens’s radical individualism implied in some literature about lifelong learning and identity, I point out that the importance of reflexivity in relation to personal identity and in relation to learning, need to be critically examined in Giddens’s analysis and need to be understood from different approaches.

In Chapter 3, I explore Paul Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity, narrative identity and how the notion of reflexivity can be viewed differently from this theory. This chapter starts with a general discussion of a conceptual paradox of personal identity and how Ricoeur responds to the issue. Then the chapter is developed by following three modes of dialectics contained in Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity. First, I clarify and interpret in detail Ricoeur’s conceptual analysis of personal identity by focusing on the difference between identity as sameness (idem-identity) and identity as selfhood (ipse-identity) and the dialectic between them. This distinction suggests two different concepts of identity on the ontological level. Idem-identity can be seen as identity as a ‘thing’, an ‘entity’; ipse-identity can be seen as identity as a ‘being’, a ‘Dasein’. Then, I
move to the section on Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity, where I
distinguish the notion of ‘narrative identity’ on a conceptual level and in a
practical category. The notion of narrative identity on a conceptual level is a
notion that Ricoeur suggests in order to resolve the paradox of personal
identity, which can function as a mediator between idem-identity and
ipse-identity. The notion of narrative identity in a practical category is about
one’s personal identity identified through one’s self-interpretation of one’s
personal and community story. It is exactly in the notion of narrative identity
on the conceptual level that I find different views of reflexivity in relation to
identity. This is not only because narrative is by nature reflexive in terms of
prefiguration, configuration and refiguration. More importantly, narrative identity
has an internal dialectic as a kind of discordant concordance that can be
inscribed in the dialectic between identity as sameness and identity as selfhood.
Narrative submits imaginative variations to narrative identity to mediate
between idem-identity and ipse-identity. The implication is that such kind of
variations can be deliberately made by an individual in his/her reflexivity to
examine the different proportions of the constitution of one’s personal identity.

The second dialectic exists between selfhood and others. A mode of reflexivity
mediated between selfhood and others therefore can be found in this dialectic
relationship. The third dialectic, the dialectic between sameness and others, is
finally revealed, which crowns the first two dialectics. From here, the
reflexivity mediated between sameness and others emerged. In the end, I
present my thoughts on the role of learning and aspects of lifelong learning
implied in different modes of reflexivity emerged from three kinds of dialectics
presented in Ricoeur’s theories of personal identity.
In Chapter 4, I investigate Charles Taylor’s theory of identity and the role of learning in his theory. I start with a discussion on the issue of whether or not personal identity matters by reconstructing the discussions on this issue among Parfit, Ricoeur and Taylor. Then I focus on Taylor’s theory of identity by clarifying his concept of the self and his definition of identity. For Taylor, self as a being exists not only in the ‘moral space’ or a ‘space of questions’ related to strong evaluations but also in the ‘web of interlocution’. Identity is defined by one’s essential strong evaluations and is what allows us to define what is important for us and what is not. The space in question is a space where the self as an agent or strong evaluator exists to determine issues related to self-concerns in terms of quality of life and kinds of being. The notion of strong evaluation is also interpreted in detail. I then discuss Taylor’s main thesis that identity is connected with ‘good’. Losing or not having found one’s orientation towards strongly valued good(s) in the ‘moral space’ of questions, one might suffer disorientation or a sense of homelessness, or what Taylor calls ‘identity crisis’. Thus, the different fundamental strong evaluations can be seen as moral frameworks that define one’s identity. For Taylor, in order to find or deepen the understanding of our identity, there is a need to articulate the underpinned strong evaluations. It is in this mode of articulation, I find a mode of reflexivity, which is used not only to examine one’s life and identity, but also empower oneself towards the good. Then, I discuss how Taylor’s notion of moral identity is related to narrative. I end up with a discussing on the roles of learning in Taylor’s theory of identity by linking the notions of articulation, reflexivity, narrative and power of expression.

In Chapter 5, I make an attempt to deal with the question of how we should understand the role(s) of narrative in understanding the notion of identity, or the question of what contribution(s) narrative can make in understanding
identity. By referring to Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories of identity, I clarify and define how I understand the notion of identity. I approach personal identity from a dimension of conceptual constitution of this notion and the need of personal identity as a concept. Then, I conduct a detailed analysis of roles of narrative in understanding identity in Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories. I argue that what emerge from my analyses are two categories of roles of narrative in understanding identity, i.e. category of structural roles and category of interpretative roles. My conclusion is that narrative takes a multifunctional role in both categories in helping us understand identity. I also argue that simply holding either structural analysis of narrative or interpretative analysis of narrative, rather than both, will be likely to cause issues in understanding narrative identity. After that, I deal with the problem of the ‘truthfulness’ of narrative identity in relation to ‘identity’ ‘as it is’ in reality, which is a central issue that might be raised in using the notion of narrative identity. In order to do this, I first clarify the relation between life as narrative and life ‘as it is’ in reality as the background for my argument about the former issue. I conclude that if personal identity is partly constituted by self-interpretation and such self-interpretation as narrative keeps developing, it is hard to say there is something like ‘identity as it is’ in reality. Narrative identity as a concept provides us with a strong approach to understanding ourselves.

In Chapter 6, I discuss how what I have investigated can contribute to the notion of learning in respect of identity, with particular attention to lifelong learning. I start with a discussion about the emergence of the notion of lifelong learning. Then I link the view of personal identity developed from Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories with lifelong learning. Subsequently I point out the issue of normative reading of Giddens’s analysis of identity, which pervasively exists in current policies, practices and theories of lifelong learning. After that, I
revisit Giddens’ theory of self-identity and present my critical analyses of his description around three assumptions of his notion of ‘reflexivity’. I conclude that lifelong learning implied in Giddens’s theory of identity is problematic. I suggest its problematic nature lies in the fact that it is the learning merely for the sake of the external changes, a mode of learning for flexibility, which might lead to moral deficit. It is also a mode of learning based on radical individualism that might lead to ethical problems.

Next, I present the alternative views of identity by referring to Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories of identity. I also analyse the roles of reflexivity and of learning indicated in their theories. I then offer a critical synthesis of four modes of reflexive learning that is relevant to personal identity together with my discussion of different theories of lifelong learning. Continuing on I take a critical look at the necessity of narrative in relation to learning and lifelong learning concerning identity implied in Giddens’s theory. Finally, I present different views derived from Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories on the necessity of narrative in the role of learning in relation to identity.

In concluding section, I reiterate the main points of what I have investigated and main thoughts I have argued. I also offer some reflections on the concluding remarks, the weakness and the limitations of the whole thesis in this ending chapter. Then, I present some proposals that the different modes of reflexive learning that I drew from my argument will not only open some new discussions among educational researchers, but also provide new insights for policy makers in rethinking about personal development for the individual members in current societies. I also hope that this study is not only illuminative for lifelong learners in their reflection on their identities, but also helpful for lifelong educators to guide learners who explore the question of
‘who am I’ for various reasons.

I do not wish to make any claims that the outcome of the research will provide an encompassing understanding of the notion of personal identity and can produce a comprehensive theory of learning in relation to personal identity. Rather, this research tries to present itself as a case to show that the understanding of personal identity is a complex issue intertwined with multiple dimensions. Learning theories and practice in respect of personal identity therefore need to be developed with awareness of the complexities of this notion. I hope this research will open a new discussion on the complexities of identity in relation to education and what implications for learning and lifelong learning can be drawn from our understanding of personal identity.
Chapter 2 Why has identity become a problem in modern societies?

2.1 Introduction

The study of identity in sociology is not a new field. Questions of identity have been explored as early as from the middle of last century among different schools of thought in sociology (e.g., Strauss 1959; Goffman 1963; Turner 1975; Stryker 1968; Parsons 1968; Habermas 1974; Weigert et al. 1986; Gecas and Burke 1995, etc.). However it is at the end of the 20th century that the sociological study of identity appears to have become more intensive than ever before. A great number of social research projects link themselves to the notion of identity, although this notion is highly complicated and variously defined. This has made numerous modern researchers continually focus on the questions of what identity is so as to associate a proper concept of identity with their research projects. However, the question of why identity has become a problem seems to have been seldom explored. In order to narrow down this question in the following discussion, I want to explore why, according to social researchers and sociologists, identity has increasingly become a current concern. Doubtless to say, the possible answer to this fundamental question might provide a wide and clear backdrop against which questions concerning identity are studied, and thus help us gain a real and significant understanding of what problems concerning research projects into identity are to try to solve.

In this chapter, I endeavour to provide an analysis of why has identity become a problem in modern Western societies by exploring what different sociologists think about this question. I will start with discussing some key concepts related to the notion of identity. Next I will explore how Western modern society is linked with individual’s identity. Then, I will particularly
focus on an analysis of two leading British sociologists, Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman. Whilst they present the theoretical views of late modernity and liquid modernity respectively in sociology today, American sociologist Richard Sennett provides us with a different discussion on identity based on his empirical studies.

2.2 Why identity and modernity?
Identity is basically defined as ‘sense of self’. This over-generalized understanding of identity might be problematic since this understanding is subject to the understanding of a more complex notion, the ‘self’. Self is multi-faced, and so is identity. Self is biological, psychological, sociological and even cultural, and they all intertwine together. Lewis writes,

‘Sense of self initially involves simply sensing that one’s body is separate from others, so that identity begins with a physical sense of the boundaries of one’s body and where it is in space’ (Lewis 1990, pp.277-300).

However, it is not that simple. Freud equated the ego with our sense of self in his early writing (e.g. Freud 1923). He then began to portray ego more as a set of psychic functions such as reality-testing, defence, synthesis of information, intellectual functioning, memory, and the like. But identity cannot be simply equated with ego-identity, a term devised by Erikson (see Erikson 1959). There are also sociological views. Oyserman conceptualises identity as answering the questions of ‘who am I?’, ‘Where do I belong?’, and ‘how do I fit?’ (2004). Based on this understanding, Brew and Miles (2004) suggest,

‘Although the focus of these questions is on the ‘I’—the individual self-concept—the self is meaningful only in the context of one’s relationship to others and one’s position in social groups’ (p.3).
The fact that self-concept is conceptualized as a social product that develops through one’s relationships with others and what they see in one’s self has long been seen in Symbolic Interactionism School (e.g. James 1890, Cooley 1902, Mead 1921-1925/1964, Goffman 1959, 1963). In this theoretical line of ‘self’, Goffman has contributed his notion of identity. Here the notion of identity stresses the identification of an individual from others both in daily encounters between individuals (personal identity) and according to social categories (social identity). It could be argued that although ego-identity in principle might be described as how an individual him/herself, not others, feels about or senses him/her ‘self’, it is not a notion without social elements since he/she ‘internalizes’ the external socio-cultural influences that are exerted on one’s ‘core of self’, the ego, and puts others’ views into considerations in constructing his/her ‘sense of self’. As Tajfel’s claims, ‘the study of “identity” refers to the content of self-knowledge as it is represented to and by others. Identity represents the conceptual link between the individual and the society as a whole’ (Tajfel 1981 cited in Brewer and Miles 2004).

However, is self a passive entity or dynamic entity to the external social influences? In the sociological field, the inter-influences between social reality/structure and the formation/development of ‘self’ have been recognized as early as in the middle of last century (e.g. Berger and Luckmann 1966; Parsons 1968). Moreover a similar line of thought continued in modern sociology, for example through the theory of structuration (see Giddens 1979,1984). Those theories at least suggest that self as a whole and society to some extent shape each other. But is self passive or autonomous in responding to the impact of modern society? How does self respond to social changes in modern societies? There have been some sociological concerns about these
questions and different explanations like narcissism, hedonism, survivalism and human agency have emerged in the past few decades. Thus, questions of identity became more contentious. Since the contour of self develops in its interaction with social reality, any analysis of questions of identity should therefore go hand in hand with societal analysis. Thus it is firstly essential for us to examine the conditions of modern social reality, in order then to find out how the self responds to social influences.

2.3 What are modernity and modernization?
Modernity is a term used to describe the condition of being ‘modern’ and the consequences of being modernized. There are different views about defining modernity. ‘Modern’ can mean all of post-medieval European history, in the context of dividing history into three large epochs: Antiquity or Ancient history, the Middle Ages, and Modern times. Rather than holding this artificial division of history, some theorists consider that being modern has many different meanings. For example, Habermas even maintains that from the 12th century until the Enlightenment, people saw themselves as ‘modern’ whenever they looked back to antiquity as a period to be emulated, as an ideal to which one should return. This condition changed with the advent of the Enlightenment, and with the beginning of what is generally termed modernism. This is the term that Habermas sees as that which ‘simply makes an abstract opposition between tradition and the present’ (Habermas 1981, p.147).
Modern as Post-Medieval\(^1\) is to describe the condition of Western History since the mid-1400’s, or roughly marked by the European discovery of moveable type and the printing press. Some remarkable movements and thoughts characterize this period:

- Rise of the nation state
- Industrialization
- Rise of capitalism
- Emergence of Socialist countries
- Rise of representative democracy
- Increasing role of science and technology
- Rise of social movements
- Urbanization
- Mass literacy
- Proliferation of mass media

Thus, modernity can be seen as a series of consequences, a social development over several periods with many influential events which denote breaks in the continuity of human social life. These events might include, for example,

- The Age of Discovery
- The Renaissance
- The Reformation and Counter Reformation
- The Age of Reason
- The Enlightenment
- The Romantic
- The Victorian / The Industrial Revolution
- The Modern
- The Postmodern
- The Arrival of the Printing Press
- The English Civil War
- The American Revolution

\(^1\) Part of the discussion of this term and the list of periods and events have referred to the entry of ‘modernity’ in Wikipedia. Available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernity
Since the term ‘modern’ can describe a wide range of periods, modernity therefore must be taken in context. The term ‘modernity’ can specifically refer to the conditions of human life that originated in the Western world in the period starting somewhere between 1870s and 1910s, to the present (or even more specifically to the 1910s-1960s period) and which increasingly influences the rest of the world. By the middle of the 20th century, with the advance of modernization, a notion I will discuss below, has gone beyond the Western world and became widely regarded as a global tendency in which all states strove to become ‘modern’ like Western countries. As Giddens asserts,

‘modernity refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently become more or less worldwide in their influence’ (Giddens 1990, p.1).

However, globalization, the end of the Cold War, ethnic conflicts, and the proliferation of information technologies are taken by some theorists as reasons to adopt a new vision to see the advent of ‘late-modernity’ or ‘post-modernity’.

Modernization is a process that creates a modern society. The concept of modernization might have originated from ‘Social Evolutionary Theory’. That is, social change is a unidirectional and predetermined process, from a primitive to an advanced state. Referring to Charles Darwins’s approach to biological development, this theory assumes that social change is slow,
gradual and piecemeal and therefore is evolutionary rather than revolutionary. This theory also imposes a value judgement on the evolutionary process: the movement toward the final phase is good because it represents progress, humanity, and civilization, which is in line with Western European cultural parameters. In this sense, modernization is a progressive process. While advocating this theory, Talcott Parsons presents the Structural Functionalist Theory, maintaining that human society is like a biological organism, with different parts corresponding to the different institutions that make up a society (see Parsons 1968). Each institution performs a specific function for the good of the whole, so functionalist theory states that societies tend to be in harmony, stability, equilibrium and the status quo. ‘Modernization’ understood in this line can be seen as a social organizing process being differentiated and pluralized with increasing labour-division. Moore has given a relative comprehensive definition of modernization, which is based on Evolutionary and Functionalist assumptions:

‘modernization refers to a total transformation of a traditional or pre-modern society into the types of technology and associated social organization that characterized the advanced, economically prosperous, and relatively politically stable nations of the Western world’ (Moore1963, p.89).

Smelser and Rostow contribute different views on modernization from sociological and economic perspectives. Smelser (1969) distinguished four processes of modernization from a traditional society to a modern one: a move from a simple to a complex technology, a change from subsistence farming to cash crops, a move from animal and human power to machine power, a move from rural settlements to urban settlements. This offers us a clear picture that differentiates traditional societies and modern ones. Rostow (1960) concentrates on the economic system of modernization from a capitalistic point
of view. He shows factors needed for a country to reach the path to modernization in his Rostovian take-off model with five categories or stages of economic growth. From this line, modernization is characterized as Industrialism and Capitalism.

Modernization can also be seen from political and psychological perspectives. David Apter (1996) concentrated on the political system and history of democracy, researching into the connection between democracy, good governance, efficiency and modernization. In his work ‘The Achieving Society’ (1967) David McClelland approached this notion from the psychological perspective, with his achievement motivations theory. McClelland argued that modernization cannot happen until a given society values innovation, success and free enterprise. In his book entitled ‘Becoming Modern’, (1974), Alex Inkeles creates a model of modern personality. Here the modern personality needs to be independent, active, interested in public policies and cultural matters, open to new experiences, rational and able to create long-term plans for the future. Ulrick Beck develops his notion of ‘reflexive modernization’ (see Beck 1992). When this notion is applied to an individual, it can be seen as a process of modernization of an individual through personal reflexivity as the result of organizational reflexivity produced in risk modern society.

Nowadays, the different aspects of modernization have been extended to the states around the globe as I mentioned above. To give a new definition of modernization, I will follow Best and Kellner’s theory:

‘The dynamics by which modernity produced a new industrial and colonial world can be described as ‘modernization’—a term denoting those processes of individualization, secularisation, industrialization, cultural differentiation, commodification, urbanization, bureaucraticisation, and rationalization which together have constituted
However, some modernization theories have asserted that modernization nowadays is a process of Europeanization and/or Northamericanization of the rest of the world. This becomes one aspect of modernization theory that critics attack.

Over the landscape of modernization theory, what is widely accepted among social scientists is that modernization is a paradoxical gift or double-edged weapon. On the one hand, modernization brought more remarkable benefits to human social life than any pre-modern ages. For example, lower infant mortality rate, decreased death from starvation, eradication of some fatal diseases, an easier life that is aided by technology, greater equality to people from different social and economic backgrounds and so on. On the other hand, many more sinister sides of modernization emerged. These include for example, the development of technology that escalates the scale and the damage of war as well as the arms race and development of nuclear weaponry, the appearance of totalitarianism and ecological catastrophes. The impacts of modernization on human individuals have also been bombarded from different directions. For example, there appear to be more and more psychological and moral hazards in modern life. These include: alienation, feelings of rootlessness, loss of strong bonds and common values, hedonism, narcissism and so on. Any individual’s identity thus becomes increasingly problematic with the advancement of modernization. This might be one reason why the problem of identity draws the attention of modern sociologists. As Wiegert et al. (1986) noted, for functionalists like Parsons, increasing social complexity presents a wide range of possible choices and subsequent cross-pressures once the individual makes a commitment to one or another set of positions and acquires the...
attendant identities...The modern person is much more aware of the problem of identity than persons living in simpler, stabler societies’ (Wiegert et al. 1986, p.19 cited in Côté and Levine 2002, p.38).

This view indicates that any analysis of the problem of identity should be linked with adequate and analytical understanding of modernity and/or modernization in present day.

2.4 Giddens’s view: self-identity with anxieties caused by external changes

Among sociologists, Anthony Giddens is the one who develops a systematic theory and a sophisticated analysis of the problems of identity in relation to modern society, particularly in the Western world at the end of the 20th century. Putting his analysis in the connection between micro level (structure) and macro level (individual) of today’s modern society, Giddens identifies the fact that we are neither in the conditions of modernity nor ‘post-modernity’ now, but in the settings of what he calls as ‘late’ or ‘high’ modernity. Here the ‘self’ has undergone massive changes caused by social transformations and he particularly focuses on negative impacts of social changes on the self. In the following section, I will present what late/high modernity is in Giddens’ view and why identity has become a problem under those conditions.

2.4.1 Modernity: Giddens’s view

According to Giddens, to understand and rethink the nature of modernity, one needs to analyse it from the constitution and forms of social order, that is, the ‘modern institutions’. In Giddens’s own words, ‘Modernity must be understood on an institutional level’ (Giddens 1991, p. 1). Here, he uses the term ‘modernity’ to generally refer to ‘the institutions and modes of behaviour established first of all in post-feudal Europe, but which in the twentieth century increasingly have become world-historical in their impact’ (ibid., p.15).
For him, what separates modern institutions from pre-modern cultures and ways of life is a certain discontinuity or a set of discontinuities. The modern world is a ‘runaway world’ with its extreme dynamism characterized by the pace of social change (e.g. technology), scope of change (e.g. tendency of globalization) and nature of modern institutions (e.g. nation-state, commercialization, capitalism) (Giddens1990, p.6). According to Giddens, the modes of life being transformed by modernity are very different from traditional types of social order. The transformations brought by modernity can be characterised as extensionality and intentionality. Modernity’s extensional transformation (e.g. globalising influences) undercuts traditional habit and customs and establishes forms of social interconnection that span the globe. In terms of intentionality, modernity ‘comes to alter some of the most intimate and personal features of our day-to-day existence’ (1990, p.4).

According to Giddens, three main elements can explain the peculiarly dynamic character of modern social life:

(1) The separation of time and space: the condition for the articulation of social relations across wide spans of time-space, up to and including global systems (1991, p.19-20). Traditional society is based on direct interaction between people living close to each other in one certain fixed space. Modern societies expand further and further across space and time using mass media and interactive media.

(2) Disembedding mechanisms: consist of symbolic tokens and expert systems (these together are called abstract system). The term used to describe ‘the lifting out of social relationships from local contexts and their recombination across indefinite time/space distances’ (ibid. p.233).
Abstract system brackets time and space. Symbolic tokens, e.g. money, brackets both time, because it is a means of credit, and space, since standardised values allow transactions between a multiplicity of individuals who never physically meet one another. Expert systems bracket time and space through deploying modes of technical knowledge of scientists, technicians or engineers, which have validity independent of the practitioners and clients who make use of them, e.g. food, medicines, the buildings, transport, etc. Expert systems also extend to social relations themselves and to the intimacies of the self, e.g. doctor, counsellor and therapist. Both types of expert system depend on the trust of the individuals. Giddens explains, ‘Trust presumes a leap to commitment, a quality of “faith”, which is irreducible. It is specifically related to absence in time and space, as well as to ignorance’ (ibid., p.19).

(3) Institutional reflexivity: Modernity’s reflexivity refers to the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge (ibid., p.20). It involves the routine incorporation of new knowledge or information into any environment of action that are thereby reconstituted or reorganised (ibid., p.243). Contrary to Enlightenment expectations for certitude of rational knowledge, under the conditions of modernity, increased knowledge and information related to social life are always open to revision, and might even be abandoned. As Giddens writes, ‘The transformation of time and space, coupled with the disembedding mechanisms, propel social life away from the hold of pre-established precepts and practices’ (ibid., p.20).
2.4.2 What is the late/high modernity?

The question of modernity, however, according to Giddens, has reappeared as a fundamental sociological problem at the turn of the twenty-first century. A problem that relates to its past development and current institutional forms. Among today’s theorists, there is a general agreement that significant social, economic, technological and cultural changes took place in the Western world in the latter part of the 20th century. These changes include globalization, the end of the Cold War, the proliferation of information technologies and bio-technology, and ethnic conflicts. But there is also a debate over how much change has happened and why the changes have arisen. Many labels such as ‘post-modern society’ (Lyotard, Bauman), ‘risk society’ (Beck) and ‘information society’ (Castells), or ‘knowledge-based society’ appear. While Giddens acknowledges that the contours of the new and different order are remarkable in today’s world, he does not agree that people nowadays enter a totally new era called a post-modern era. Instead, he claims that ‘we are moving into one in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalised and universalised than before’ (Giddens 1990, p.3). This is called by him ‘high modernity’ or ‘late modernity’ which is defined as ‘the current phase of development of modern institutions, marked by the radicalising and globalising of basic traits of modernity’ (Giddens 1991, p.243).

Since knowledge about circumstances of social life has to be regularised so as to use it as a constitutive element in the organization and transformation of modes of life, ‘institutional reflexivity’ continues to be dynamic feature of late modernity. As Giddens writes,

‘The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming transformation about those very practices, thus
CHAPTER 2

constitutively altering their character’ (ibid., p.38).

In this sense, late modernity to some extent can be seen as ‘reflexive modernity’. This suggests that late modern society becomes much more reflexive and self-aware than earlier modern settings. As we will discuss below, this parameter of modernity has made a great impact on the individual and it seems that a modern person’s sense of self has to be reflexively made too. The intensification of institutional and individual reflexivity in the absence of sure foundations of knowledge has a chronic propensity to manufacture uncertainty and has resulted in ‘radicalised modernity’ becoming one feature of ‘late modernity’.

Agreeing with Ulrich Beck, Giddens contends a ‘climate of risk’ is a characteristic of late/high modernity. As Giddens writes,

’in a post-traditional social universe, an indefinite range of potential courses of action (with their attendant risks) is at any given moment open to individuals and collectivities’ (Giddens 1991, p.28-29).

Giddens further explains,

‘it is not that day-to-day is inherently more risky than was the case in prior eras. It is rather that, in conditions of modernity, for lay actors as well as for experts in specific fields, thinking in terms of risk and risk assessment is a more or less ever-present exercise, of a partly imponderable character’ (ibid., p124).

How? First, late modernity is apocalyptical due to ‘high-consequence risks’ which ‘are pervasively consequential in terms of their implications for very large numbers of people’ (ibid., p.243). And ‘…not because it is inevitably
heading towards calamity, but because it introduces risks which previous
generations have not had to face’ (ibid., p.4). For example, nuclear weapons
and novel weaponry is more likely to lead to massive warfare, ecological
catastrophe and economic crisis etc. Second, institutionally organized risk is full
of uncertainties for individuals. In Giddens’ words,

‘to live in the “world” produced by high modernity has the feeling
of riding a juggernaut. It is not just that more or less continuous and
profound processes of change occur; rather, change does not
consistently conform either to human expectation or to human
control’ (ibid., p.28).

This has become ‘a fundamental cultural aspect of modernity, in which
awareness of risk forms a medium of colonising the future’ (ibid., p.244).
According to Giddens, the elements of risk to be encountered in late modernity
are far more radicalised than was the case in ‘modernity’, with the
proliferation of specialisms (expert systems) combining with the advance of
modern institutions and thus no one can escape. As he writes,

‘For the most part, however, institutionally structured risk
environments are much more prominent in modern than premodern
societies. Such institutionalised systems of risk affect virtually
everyone, regardless of whether or not they are ‘players’ within
them—competitive markets in products, labour power, investments
or money provide the most significant example (ibid, p 117-118)’.

2.4.3 Self and self-identity in relation to the late modernity

For Giddens, ‘late/high modernity’ is the continuing development of ‘modernity’,
and is still forged by the extension of the same social forces that shaped the
previous age. In late modern settings, modernity’s extensional and intentional
transformations are more radical than ever. With respect to intentionality,
Giddens stresses, ‘the transmutations introduced by modern institutions
interlace in a direct way with individual life and therefore with the self’ (ibid., p.3). Late modernity’s extensionality also is characterized as globalisation. Moreover, intentionality and extensionality are interconnected. As Giddens writes, ‘Transformations in self-identity and globalisations are the two poles of the dialectic of the local and global in condition of high modernity’ (ibid, p.32). He also asserts, ‘Changes in intimate aspects of personal life, in other words, are directly tied to the establishment of social connections of very wide scope’ (ibid.). This dialectic suggests that questions of identity need to be analysed by linking self with late modernity. More precisely, in Giddens’s view, in the context of late modern settings, ‘new mechanisms of self-identity…are shaped by – yet also shape – the institutions of modernity’ (ibid., p.2). Three questions emerge here.

The first question which emerges relates to how late modernity has its impacts on individual’s life, and his/her identity. Giddens suggests that in social transformations from traditional institutions to post-traditional institutions, an individual’s self undergoes deep psychic changes. With the impacts of a radicalised dynamism of modernity, including institutional reflexivity and risk environment on the individual life:

‘[t]ransitions in individual’s lives have always demand psychic reorganisation, something which was often ritualised in traditional cultures in the shape of rites de passage (i.e. the changed identity was clearly staked out from adolescence to adulthood)’ (ibid.,p.33).

However, ‘in the settings of modernity, by contrast, the altered self has to be explored and constructed as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change ‘ (ibid.).
These psychic changes are expressed as a new kind of anxiety. Giddens writes,

‘What happens is a flooding in of anxiety which the ordinary connections of day-to-day life usually keep successfully at bay. The natural attitude brackets out questions about ourselves, others and the object world which have to be taken for granted in order to keep on with everyday activity’ (ibid., p.37).

Thus, these new anxieties threaten an individual’s ontological security. For Giddens, such anxiety of the ‘self’ is also related to the existential issues, to the very roots of coherent sense of ‘being in the world’. One key element of ontological security and existential issues concerns the continuity of self-identity, that is, ‘the persistence of feelings of personhood in a continuous self and body’ (ibid., p.55). His profound analysis of this form of anxiety is precisely defined thus:

‘As a general phenomenon, anxiety derives from the capacity—and, indeed, necessity—for the individual to think ahead, to anticipate future possibilities counterfactually in relation to present action. But in a deep way, anxiety (or its likelihood) comes from very ‘faith’ in the dependent existence of persons and objects that ontological security implies’ (ibid., p.48).

In late modernity, Giddens suggests that such kind of anxiety is more commonplace than ever because social changes, uncertainties and diversity of possibilities created by high modernity and their negative influences on the self are more and more radicalized than ever. In the meanwhile, in high modern settings, the mass media’s impact on the intimacies of the self, becomes more and more commonplace and creates new forms of fragmentation and dispersal. As Giddens writes,
'With the development of mass communication, particularly electronic communication, the interpenetration of self-development and social systems, up to and including global systems, becomes ever more pronounced' (ibid., p.4).

This situation also makes a modern individual feel deeper anxiety in terms of the question of self-identity. So for Giddens, self-identity becomes problematic because external changes break the integrity and continuity of individual’s sense of the self in terms of ontological security.

Then, the second question is: how does the self respond to those impacts? As I have shown at the beginning of this section, according to Giddens, self-identity and the institution of modernity shape each other. Then it is not difficult to understand although new anxieties are mainly caused by external changes from, for example, the abstract system. Individuals, however, driven by these new anxieties, seem to still resort to the abstract system. More precisely, they invest their trust or faith in an abstract system in order to protect their ontological security, including their continuity of self-identity.

For Giddens, the abstract system, e.g., expert knowledge, has, ‘become centrally involved not only in the institutional order of modernity but also in the formation and continuity of the self’ (ibid., p.33). He gives as an example the rise of modes of modern therapy and counselling of all kinds to illustrate the connection between abstract systems and the self (see ibid.). This seems to stress that the self is not passive, but active in its response to the external changes that impinge on it. He believes in the late modern settings, the self, like the reflexive institutions of modernity, becomes a reflexive project. The reflexivity of self according to Giddens, under the impacts of external changes, is ‘a phenomenon which, on the level of the individual, like the broader
institutions of modernity, balances opportunity and potential catastrophe in equal measure’ (ibid., p.34).

Finally, the third question is: how exactly is an individual’s project in terms of calculative measure between the self and risky social situations to be understood? Giddens’s notion of the self seems to be based on an active individualism, since he assumes that the self has become the self of self-actualization and self-realization in the late modern settings. Meanwhile, the reflexivity of modernity, according to Giddens, ‘extends into the core of the self’ (ibid., p.33). In ‘reflexive modernity’, individuals as actors and agents are much less concerned with the precedents set by previous generations, and options are at least as open as the law and public opinion will allow. Therefore individual actions now require much more analysis and consideration before they are taken. To quote Giddens,

‘The social conventions produced and reproduced in our day-to-day activities are reflexively monitored by the agent as part of ‘going on’ in the variegated settings of our lives. Reflexive awareness in this sense is characteristic of all human action, and is the specific condition of that massively developed institutional reflexivity spoken of in the preceding chapter as an intrinsic component of modernity. All human beings continuously monitor the circumstances of their activities as a feature of doing what they do, and such monitoring always has discursive features. In other words, agents are normally able, if asked, to provide discursive interpretations of the nature of, and the reasons for, the behaviour in which they engage’ (ibid., p.35).

Accordingly, the individual’s self in ‘high’ or ‘late’ modernity, for Giddens, has to be reflexively made. He argues that,
‘systems of accumulated expertise – which form important disembedding influences – represent multiple sources of authority, frequently internally contested and divergent in their implications. In the settings of what I call ‘high’ or ‘late’ modernity – our present-day world – the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made’ (ibid., p.3).

In this sense, Giddens suggests that in the conditions of late modernity, the individual’s reflexivity is much needed and more significant than ever.

However, after claiming that the self has to be reflexively made in late modern settings, Giddens immediately points out, ‘Yet this task has to be accomplished amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities’ (ibid., p.3). Why? Firstly, this is because for the most part in the modern world, while modernity protects people from dangers like wild beasts, inclement weather and crops failure, it also brings new ‘risks’ and ‘uncertainties’. As Giddens asserts, late/high modernity

‘is characterised by widespread scepticism about providential reason, coupled with the recognition that science and technology are double-edged, creating new parameters of risk and danger as well as offering beneficent possibilities for humankind….The chronic entry of knowledge into the circumstances of action it analyses or describes creates a set of uncertainties to add to the circular and fallible character of post-traditional claims to knowledge’ (ibid., pp.27-28).

Secondly, although the traditional notion of ‘fate’ still exists, a course of events is no longer considered totally preordained in circumstances of modernity. Thus Giddens maintains,

‘To accept risk as risk, an orientation which is more or less forced on us by the abstract systems of modernity, is to acknowledge that
no aspects of our activities follow a predestined course, and all are open to contingent happenings (ibid.).

In this sense, modern people have to act by choosing ‘an indefinite range of potential courses of action (with their attendant risks)’ and this is always an ‘as if’ matter, a question of selecting between possible worlds’ (ibid., p.29). Consequently Giddens concludes, ‘Living in “risk society” means living with a calculative attitude to the open possibilities of action, positive and negative, with which, as individuals and globally, we are confronted in a continuous way in our contemporary social existence’ (ibid., p.28).

Therefore, under such conditions, Giddens concludes that the task of self-formation has to be reflexively made and remade continually. By the same token, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour (see ibid., p.5). Thus, self-identity has to be understood by a person in terms of his/her biography and autobiography as a narrative. This is in order to keep a coherent identity, under the impact of continual external changes on the self. As he writes, ‘The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems’ (ibid.).

**2.4.4 Giddens’s analysis: lifestyles and self-identity formation**

From Giddens’ notion of self-identity, that is, the self reflexively understood by the person in terms of her/his biography/autobiography, we can perceive an *agentic* self in one’s continual interaction with the vicissitudes of one’s social life. This autonomous capability of the self, or what Giddens calls as ‘human agent’ (ibid., p.175), makes individuals actively respond to the basic questions of who am I and how to act and respond to the ever-changing modern situations in which the tasks of self-actualization and self-realization have to
be performed. Giddens shows us that the self is never a passive entity. The self never stops shaping and reshaping itself in its intertwining with external social forces even under the overwhelming influence of the dynamic global and local transformations nowadays. With this *agentic* capability and through ‘life politics’, i.e. the politics of choices of *lifestyle*, individuals therefore are able to shape, alter and reflexively sustain the narrative of self-identity by connecting future projects with past experiences in a *reasonably coherent* fashion in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life.

In any setting of high modernity, a rich array of lifestyles is also part of a diversity of dazzling choices. Giddens considers that self-identity has increasingly depended on lifestyle choice. He stresses that lifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily activity. He holds that the choice of lifestyle, the confrontation of and the decision on a diversity of possibilities of ways of life concerns the core of self-identity. As he writes,

‘In conditions of high modernity, we all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so—we have no choice but to choose. A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity’ (ibid., p.81).

Hence, Giddens seems to suggest that choices in lifestyle are decisions not only about how to act but who to be. He writes, ‘The more post-traditional the settings in which an individual moves, the more lifestyle concerns the very core of self-identity, its making and remaking’ (ibid.). The ‘openness’ of social life today, the pluralisation of contexts of action and the diversity of ‘authorities’ all make lifestyle choices more possible than ever. *Life-planning* for
the individual’s future therefore becomes essential to the formation of self-identity. As Giddens writes,

‘Reflexively organised life-planning, which normally presumes consideration of risks as filtered through contact with expert knowledge, becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity’ (ibid., p.5).

Based on these thoughts, Giddens puts forward the idea of life politics. Life politics as a ‘politics of life decisions’ concerns debates and contestations emerging from the issues of the self and self-identity influenced by globalising tendency in post-traditional contexts (see Giddens 1991). For Giddens, the importance of the agenda of life politics lies in his good wishes that ‘they (agenda) call for a remoralising of social life and they demand a renewed sensitivity to questions that the institutions of modernity systematically dissolve’ (ibid., p.244).

To sum up, the question of why self-identity becomes a problem for Giddens is that under the dynamic impact of late modernity and with the interplay of the dialectic of the local and global, ‘the self undergoes massive change’ (ibid., p.80). This change causes many anxieties concerning an individual’s trust in her/his dependent existence on persons and objects in terms of his/her ontological security. Under the conditions of reflexivity of modernity, the self thus becomes the ‘reflexive project of the self’, and by the same token, self-identity is thus no longer seen as something that is given but appears as something ‘that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual’ (ibid., p.52). Furthermore, ‘self-identity is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography/autobiography (ibid., p.53). Giddens therefore points out that the
choices of lifestyles and life-planning are increasingly significant to the constitution of self-identity of the people nowadays.

2.5 Bauman’s view: identity as an unfulfilled project due to radical individualism

2.5.1 What is liquid modernity?

Bauman argues that we have moved away from a ‘heavy’, ‘solid’ and hardware-focused modernity to a ‘light’, ‘liquid’, ‘fluid’ and software-based modernity. Bauman points out that the ‘spirit’ of modernity is ‘melting the solids’, that is, ‘dissolving whatever persists over time and is negligent of its passage or immune to its flow’ (Bauman 2000, p.3). In early modernity, ‘melting the solids’ is the process of one solid replacing another solid. As Bauman writes,

‘The first solid to be melted and the first sacreds to be profaned were traditional loyalties, customary rights and obligations which bound hands and feet, hindered moves and cramped the enterprise. To set earnestly about the task of building a new (truly solid!) order, it was necessary to get rid of the ballast with which the older burdened the builders’ (ibid., p.3-4).

This is a ‘solid modernity’, which was dominated by an instrumental rationality claimed by Max Weber or determining role of economy articulated by Karl Marx. It is more ‘solid’ than ‘the orders it replaced, because—unlike them—it was immune to the challenge from non-economic action’ (ibid., p.4). For Bauman, solid modernity acted as a ‘basis’ of social life and treated other realms of life as ‘superstructure’, which is actually an ‘artefact of the “basis” whose sole function was to service its smooth and continuing operation’ (ibid.). It is called a solid modernity also because it is considered as ‘lasting’ or permanent, something which ‘one could trust and rely upon and which would
make the world predictable and therefore manageable’ (ibid., p.3). Such modernity is a frame which ‘encapsulated the totality of life conditions and life prospects and determined the range of realistic life projects and life strategies’ (ibid., p.7).

However, Bauman criticises the fact that ‘solid modernity’ turned out to be ‘rigid, fatal and sealed off from any freedom of choice’ (ibid., p.3), and the ‘rigidity of order’ is ‘the artefact and sediment of the human agents’ freedom’ (ibid., p.5). Bauman argues that there is a decline in the illusions of ‘solid modernity’ as mentioned above. Rather, the condition in which we live nowadays is ‘liquid modernity’. He writes,

‘Configuration, constellations, patterns of dependency and interaction were all thrown into the melting pot, to be subsequently recast and refashioned; this was the ‘breaking the mould’ phase in the history of the ‘inherently transgressive, boundary-breaking, all-eroding modernity’ (ibid., p.6).

The freedom in liquid modernity is ‘the radical melting of the fetters and manacles rightly or wrongly suspected of limiting the individual freedom to choose and to act’ (ibid., p.5). Meanwhile, more and more new patterns and configurations appeared under numerous and profound social changes. There are so many different kinds of patterns and configurations—they clash with one another and there is no authoritative single pattern that can be seen in solid modernity. As Bauman writes,

‘the world full of possibilities is like a buffet table set with mouth-watering dishes, too numerous for the keenest of eaters to hope to taste them all. The diners are consumers, and the most taxing and irritating of the challenges consumers confront is the need to establish priorities: the necessity to forsake some unexplored
options and to leave them unexplored. The consumers’ misery derives from the surfeit, not the dearth of choices (Have I used my means to the best advantage?’ is the consumer’s most haunting, insomnia-causing question’ (ibid., p.63).

Bauman thus called this as ‘moving from the era of pre-allocated “reference groups” into the epoch of “universal comparison”’ (ibid. p.7).

As a result, those possibilities have changed their nature and have been reclassified as ‘items in the inventory of individual task’ (ibid.). Consequently Bauman perceives that the ‘liquidizing powers’ have moved from the “system” to “society”, from “politics” to “life-policies” – or have “descended from the “macro” to the “micro” level of social cohabitation (ibid.). This is why Bauman thinks that the present conditions of Western societies are the ‘individualized, privatized version of modernity, with the burden of pattern-weaving and the responsibility for failure falling primarily on the individual’s shoulders’ (ibid.). Based on the notion of radical individualization, he sharply points out the loss of public sphere in fluid modernity:

‘The solids whose turn has come to be thrown into melting pot and which are in the process of being melted at the present time, the time of fluid modernity, are the bonds which interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions – the patterns of communication and co-ordination between individually conducted life policies on the one hand and political actions of human collectivities on the other (ibid., p. 6)

2.5.2 Problem of identity and individual de jure

For an individual, ‘being modern’, in Bauman’s view, ‘means being perpetually ahead of oneself, in a state of constant transgression. It also means having an identity which can exist only as an unfulfilled project’ (ibid., p.28-29).
For Bauman, this is one key reason why identity becomes more and more problematic in nowadays. According to Bauman, there are at least three explanations for the cause of this problem.

First of all, as can be seen above, for Bauman, one main characteristics of liquid modernity is its radicalized ‘individualization’. Driven by radical individualism, individual’s desire of ‘being somebody’ never ends in front of endless choices, which is the liquid condition of ‘the impossibility of ever being gratified’. To quote his own words,

‘Being modern came to mean, as it means today, being unable to stop and even less able to stand still. We move and are bound to keep moving not so much because of the ‘delay of gratification’, as Max Weber suggested, as because of the impossibility of ever being gratified: the horizon of satisfaction, the finishing line of effort and the moment of restful self-congratulation move faster than the fastest of the runners’ (ibid., p.28).

In this condition, an individual is no longer free when the end has been reached; he/she is not him/herself when he/she becomes somebody. Thus Bauman claims, ‘The state of unfinishedness, incompleteness and undertermination is full of risk and anxiety; but its opposite brings no unadultered pleasure either, since it forecloses what freedom needs to stay open’ (ibid.).

Secondly, individualization not only causes the disappearance of the ‘public sphere’, it also imposes heavy burdens and responsibility on individuals. According to Bauman,
‘Being an individual *de jure* means having no one to blame for one’s own misery, seeking the causes of one’s own defeats nowhere except in one’s own indolence and sloth, and looking for no remedies other than trying harder and harder still’ (ibid., p. 38).

But individual *de facto* can ‘gain control over their fate and make the choices they truly desire’ (ibid., p.39). In Bauman’s eyes, individuals today only have freedom *de jure* and what they lack is the freedom *de facto*. This process also exerts a great influence on an individual’s identity. As he writes,

‘individualization’ consists of transforming human ‘identity’ from a ‘given’ into a ‘task’ and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance. In other words, it consists in the establishment of a de jure autonomy (whether or not the de facto autonomy has been established as well)’ (ibid., p.37).

Thirdly, as has been shown, in liquid settings, there is a surfeit of possibilities, and people increasingly have the ‘freedom to become anybody’. For Bauman, the identities in the conditions of liquid modernity are like ‘commodities’ — the ‘things’ to choose and buy:

‘Given the intrinsic volatility and unfixity of all or most identities, it is the ability to ‘shop around’ in the supermarket of identities, the degree of genuine of putative consumer freedom to select one’s identity and to hold to it as long as desired, that becomes the royal road to the fulfilment of identity fantasies. Having that ability, one is free to make and unmake identities at will. Or so it seems’ (ibid., p.83).

In this sense, modern people enjoy more ‘freedom’ to choose anyone they want to become. As Bauman writes,
‘whether genuine or putative to the eye of the analyst, the loose, “associative” status of identity, the opportunity to “shop around”, to pick and shed one’s “true self”, to “be on the move”, has come in present-day consumer society to signify freedom’ (ibid., p.87).

However, did individuals really enjoy such kinds of freedom? Bauman suggests that individuals actually suffer from it rather then gaining more freedom. He considers that this is the freedom de jure, i.e. freedom based on individual’s decisions among countless possibilities. Individuals not only suffer difficult decision-making among a dazzling diversity of choices, but also have to undertake the responsibility for choosing them. As Bauman writes,

“‘Being thrown on one’s own resources” augurs mental torments and the agony of indecision, while “responsibility resting on one’s own shoulders” portends a paralysing fear of risk and failure without the right to appeal and seek redress. This cannot be what “freedom” really means; and if “really existing” freedom, the freedom on offer, does mean all that, it can be neither the warrant of happiness nor an objective worth fighting for’ (Bauman 2000, p.19).

From Bauman’s argument, one can see that because of radical individualization, an individual’s identity has become ‘an unfulfilled project’ and to have an ‘identity’ could cause more agonies and anxieties than ever.

2.5.3 Bauman’s analysis: citizenship and Individual de facto

As can be seen from above, in Bauman’s eyes, individuals today only have freedom de jure and what they lack is freedom de facto. The choice of identity in a liquid setting is a kind of ‘passive’ choice rather than the choice made of their own will. Thus, Bauman thinks that there is a wide and growing gap between the conditions of individual de jure and chances to become individuals de facto. To be more precise,
‘The yawning gap between the right of self assertion and the capacity to control the social settings which render such self-assertion feasible or unrealistic seems to be the main contradiction of fluid modernity—one that, through trial and error, critical reflection and bold experimentation, we would need collectively to learn to tackle collectively’ (ibid., p.38).

This is why Bauman calls for the citizenship to bridge this gap. He writes,

‘The individual *de jure* cannot turn into the individual *de facto* without first becoming the citizen. There are no autonomous individuals without an autonomous society, and the autonomy of society requires deliberate and perpetually deliberated self-constitution, something that may be only a shared accomplishment of its members’ (ibid., p.40).

In this sense, individuals need to relearn forgotten citizenship skills and reappropriate lost citizenship tools for cooperation and solidarity in order to handle collectively those private agonies encountered in liquid situations.

### 2.6 Individualization, modernity and identity

From Bauman’s theory, one can realize that radical individualism is a key phenomenon that causes problems with identity today. To further understand how individualism and individualization put the identity in a troubled position, we need to go through the development of notions ‘individualism’ and ‘individualization’ *and* their relations to identity in modern time. According to Flew & Priest (2002),

‘In political ontology, individualism is the thesis that social wholes, such as states, classes, nations, or forces of history, may only exist or
act if individual human beings exist and act. In the philosophy of mind, individualism is the thesis that a person’s mental state is essentially determined by facts about that individual’s mind, rather than their environment or other individuals’ (p.196-197).

The term ‘individual’ is most often used to refer to ‘a person/human being’; however, the emphasis here is to separate and distinct from others of the same kind. It has been said that from the seventeenth century onwards this term indicated *separateness*, as in individualism (Abbs 1986, cited in Klein 2005, p.26-27). So, individualism emphasizes individual liberty, the primary importance of the individual, and the ‘virtues of self-reliance’ and ‘personal independence’. It opposes authority, and all manner of controls over the individual, especially when exercised by the political state or ‘society’. Hence, individualism is contrary to collectivism, which advocates subordination of the individual to the will of the society or community. Philosophically, individualism has its origin in the Renaissances and the Enlightenment in Europe. From historical and political points of views, individualism can be traced back to the French Revolution and American Revolution. The notion of individualism is connected to the identity as personality. The popularity of the modern term ‘personality’ has something to do with individualism. According to Sennett (Sennett 1977) ‘personality’ replaces the earlier Enlightenment belief in natural ‘character’. ‘Personality’ suggests that behaviour is the clue to inner self and that personal feelings are more important than rational control in the formation of self-identity. However, ‘Horace writes that the character of a man depends on his connections to the world. In this sense, ‘character’ is a more encompassing term than its more moderns offspring “personality”, which concerns desires and sentiments which may fester within, witnessed by no one else’ (see Sennett 1998, p.10).
The concepts of individuality/individualization in sociology have their origin in Western individualism. Individualism has only emerged as a focus for sociological research in last century. According to Giddens, Baumeister (1986) has claimed that in pre-modern times our current emphasis on individuality was absent. Durkheim (1893) holds that with the differentiation of the labour division during the emergence of modern societies, the separate individual becomes a focus of attention. Individualization has been seen as one significant process of modernization. The notion of individualization can be seen as one form of modernization related to the notion of ‘emancipation’. However, one must note that ‘individualization’ in modern social theorists’ mind has changed its meaning from early modernity. Bauman points this out well,

“‘individualization’ now means something very different from what it meant a hundred years ago and what it conveyed at the early times of the modern era - the times of the extolled ‘emancipation’ of man from the tightly knit tissue of communal dependency, surveillance and enforcement’ (Bauman 2000, p.31).

When discussing the problem of identity in modern Western societies nowadays, both Giddens and Bauman suggest that ‘individualization’ is closely bound up with the issues of identity. Also, both Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens view individualization as an unavoidable and necessary intermediate phase on the way to new forms of social life. For Bauman, in late or liquid modern settings, the task of human emancipation has done and traditional authority has declined. Instead, many authorities (possibilities and patterns) have emerged that affect an individual’s daily life. Modern individuals are thus free to choose from many possibilities but consequently are more and more in a state of confusion and uncertainty. They have to seek in personal life from personal resources what is denied to them in public
arenas. No doubt, this greatly radicalises the process of individualization. As Bauman contends, in liquid modernity, individualization has been immensely radicalised towards the unexpected conditions which causes many problems of the ‘privatized’. Sennett also argues that the fact that public space has become ‘dead’ is one reason for the pervasiveness of narcissism, one form of radical individualization (see Sennett 1977).

More importantly, individualization is accelerated by today’s consumerism in Capitalist societies. According to Giddens, at the early stage of capitalism in modernization, individualism only related to labour division and individual rights. He writes, ‘From the beginning, markets promote individualism in the sense that they stress individual rights and responsibilities, but at first this phenomenon mainly concerns the freedom of contract and mobility intrinsic to capitalistic employment’ (Giddens 1990, p.197). In the age of late modernity and liquid modernity, individualization is immensely radicalized by a consumption culture. Capitalism commodifies modern society, and commodification directly affects consumption processes. Individualism thus is cultivated by the sphere of consumption, e.g. through advertisers’ cultivation of specific consumption ‘packages’. Commodification then influences the ‘project of the self’ and the establishment of lifestyles, because, ‘to a great or lesser degree, the project of the self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and pursuit of artificially framed styles of life’ (ibid., p.198). Bauman even goes further to see identities directly as different kinds of ‘commodities’ in liquid modern settings and subsequently the individual has to keep choosing and quitting identities as if they are commodities. No matter whether this view is true or not nowadays, individualization makes identity incoherent, fragmented and unstable. As Beck asserts, in the changing conditions of modern society with radically
individualized and privatized trends, individuals must first disembed and then, re-embed into industrial society’s ways of life by adopting new ways in which individuals must produce, stage, and cobble together their biographies themselves. People nowadays have diversely different stories of their life when compared with those held by their ancestors in their life course. No wonder Peter Alheit has written of *Bastelbiografie*—the do-it-yourself biography (Alheit 1994). It is then not difficult to understand why Giddens claims that an individual’s self-identity has to be reflexively understood in terms of his/her biography/autobiography. But as Bauman sharply asserted, individualization in liquid settings, ‘consists of transforming human “identity” from a “given” into a “task” and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance’ (Bauman 2000, p.32).

However, Giddens and Bauman differ in their analyses of the problem. Giddens analyses that ‘life politics’ have emerged from an individual’s dealings with personal problems in current society. While it is significant to call for ‘agency’ to control individual’s life, including troubled self-identity, it seems that this simply makes the individualization more radicalized since this analysis suggests that all the decisions about choices have to be made by an individual her/himself and troubles brought by such decisions are that individual’s problems. However, Bauman sharply criticizes the side effects brought about by increasingly intensified individualization. There are only individuals *de jure* in present societies and they suffer the agony of decision-making in front of diversity of choices which are not their own but imposed by modern society. These are individual plights caused by radical individualization; ‘life politics’ can only deepen such individual plights.
Therefore, according to Bauman what we urgently need is citizenship to handle the privatized problem collectively.

2.7 Other questions related to the problem of identity

2.7.1 Where does the problem of identity exist?

The first question we should have a look is where does the problem of identity exist? Given that the problem of identity is closely bound up with the advancement of modernization, one can perceive from above that the problem of identity is more salient in the Western societies than in the rest of the human world. Other economically developing countries nowadays, with the trend of globalization, are striving for the entry into the group of the developed countries through their effort of modernization. However, they are generally still in the transition from local traditional settings to modern circumstances. Consequently they are not experiencing radicalised modernization as the Western world has experienced. Also, because of the different social, cultural and political systems, problems of identity emerge differently in forms and in degree. Take China as an example. China takes ‘the realization of modernization of the whole country’ as its fundamental national goal and the centrality of policy. This country has undergone rapid modernization, particularly in its economy with its rapid development of free market and ‘open-door’ policy for foreign investors. Chinese people to some extent are also individualized by a consumption culture. However on the whole, the phenomenon of individualization in China is not as radicalized and universalized as in the Western world. Also because of the Chinese socio-cultural background and political ideology, possibilities and choices in terms of individual’s life are not as indefinite as in western countries, at least not to date.
2.7.2 To whom the identity has becomes a problem?

The second key question about identity is to whom the identity has become a problem. Bauman offers an insightful answer to this question:

‘Let me note that identification is also a powerful factor in stratification; one of its most divisive and sharply differentiating dimensions. At one pole of the emergent global hierarchy are those who can compose and decompose their identities more or less at will, drawing from the uncommonly large, planet-wide pool of offers. At the other pole are crowded those whose access to identity choice has been barred, people who are given no say in deciding their preferences and who in the end are burdened with identities enforced and imposed by others; identities which they themselves resent but are not allowed to shed and cannot manage to get rid of. Stereotyping, humiliating, dehumanizing, stigmatizing identities…’ (Bauman 2004, p.38)

Then, Bauman claims that ‘most of us are suspended uneasily between those two poles’ (ibid.). Most people, according Bauman, are uncertain about how long their freedom to choose and renounce an identity will last and are worrying about their ability to hold their desirable identity in their hands. Likewise, Giddens thinks that in the circumstances of high modernity, the influences of ‘lifestyle choices and life planning’ are ‘more or less universal, no matter how objectively limiting the social situations of particular individuals or groups may be’ (Giddens 1990, p.85).

Furthermore, both Bauman and Giddens seem to suggest that the problem of identity appears to be universal is because both the rich and the poor live in the same society, same world and within the same culture. As Bauman says, ‘the poor cannot avert their eyes; there is nowhere they could avert their eyes to’ because they exist in the same society as the rich (Bauman 2000, p.88). Also according to Giddens, for poor and under-privileged people, ‘the reflexive
constitution of self-identity may be every bit as important as among more affluent strata, and as strongly affected by globalising influences’ (Giddens 1990. p.86).

Furthermore, both theorists suggest that the affluent and the privileged enjoy more choices in their life than the poor, as the rich and the privileged have more life chances and a higher volume of resources at their disposal. But different agonies may be caused. For Giddens, life chances condition lifestyle choices. In this sense, one may say that the rich face more possibilities and uncertainties in their lives. This suggests that they might suffer more anxiety in order to forge a coherent and consistent self-identity. However, for Bauman, more resources enable the rich to choose among more options and to keep selecting among the ‘fast-moving’ and new-fashioned targets. They cannot stop. If they stop, it means they have no freedom to choose any longer. Hence, Bauman writes, ‘The more choices the rich seem to have, the less bearable to all is a life without choosing’ (Bauman 2000, p.88). In another words, while the rich suffer the agony of decision-making among indefinite possibilities, they also have to keep quenching their thirst for freedom of choosing.

Richard Sennett, seeing from the notion of character, offers different views. He suggests that people who feel at home in the new capitalism are those who develop ‘the capacity to let go of one’s past, the confidence to accept fragmentation’ (Sennett 1999, p.62). The realities that drive any individual to pursue many possibilities at the same time require a particular strength of character – ‘that of someone who has the confidence to dwell in disorder, someone who flourishes in the midst of dislocation’ (ibid.). People, who have problems with anxiety concerning ‘selfhood’ in terms of certain aspects of character, working identity or self-actualisation, are passive people. Sennett
claims, ‘in a dynamic society, passive people wither’ (ibid., p.88). This view thus reveals a phenomenon that modern persons who cannot learn to adapt to the flexible society are likely to suffer identity problem.

2.7.3 How does identity become a problem?
The answers to this third question from both Giddens and Bauman are quite similar. First of all, both consider that it is the decline of traditions caused by modernization in today’s settings that makes the problem of identity present itself in a more salient manner than ever. But both however, have different emphases. For Giddens, the decline of the tradition is just one explanation of the problem of identity, but not a central reason. He writes,

‘Modernity, it might be said, breaks down the protective framework of the small community and of tradition, replacing these with much larger, impersonal organisation. The individual feels bereft and alone in a world in which she or he lacks the psychological supports and the sense of security provided by more traditional settings’ (Giddens 1990, p.33-34).

Nevertheless he stresses that the ‘anxieties’ caused by uncertainties in the future brought by changes from institutional reflexivity are the real key reason why identity has become a problem. However, Bauman stresses that modernization as individualization is the major reason for the problem of identity. He writes,

‘The shifting of responsibilities for choice onto individual shoulders, the dismantling of signposts and the removing of milestones, topped up by a growing indifference of the powers-on-high to the nature of the choices made and to their feasibility, were two trends present in the ‘challenge of self-identification’ from the start. In the course of time the two trends, closely intertwined and mutually invigorating, gathered force – even if they were frowned on,
bewailed and censured as worrying, even pathological, developments’ (Bauman 2004, p.50-51).

For Bauman, this process goes hand in hand with ‘liquefaction’ of social frameworks and institutions.

Secondly, as a key aspect of identity formation, intimate relationships between people have changed nowadays. Both theorists consider there is no ‘long-term commitment’ for amorous relationships both in late and liquid modern settings. For Giddens the partnership of ‘till death us to part’ has been replaced by ‘confluent love’. That is, in Bauman’s words, ‘a relationship that lasts only as long as and not a moment longer than, the satisfaction it brings to both partners’ (Bauman 2004, p.65). Pure relationships are very easy to break without commitment, and this greatly threatens an individual’s ontological security. Also, Bauman claims that the modern person is a ‘man without Bonds’. This is because,

‘in a world where disengagement is practised as a common strategy of the power struggle and self-assertion, there are few of any points in life that can be safely predicted to last. The “present” does not therefore bind the “future”, and there is nothing in the present that allows us to guess, let alone to visualize, the shape of things to come. Long-term thinking and, even more, long-term commitment and obligations indeed appear “meaningless”’ (ibid., p.68).

This modern feature profoundly affects a person’s identity in its original shape and form:

‘The blows strike right into the heart of human mode of being-in-the-world. After all, the hard core of identity—the answer to the question “who am I?” and even more importantly the
continuing credibility of whatever answer might have been given to the question—cannot be formed unless in reference to the bonds connecting the self to other people and the assumption that such bonds are reliable and stable over time’ (ibid., p.68).

Long-term commitment in any intimate relationship would give rise to the ambivalence. We need long-term commitment both for others and ourselves. ‘We need them nonetheless, we need them badly, and not only because of moral concern for the well-being of others, but also for our own sake, for the sake of the cohesion and logic of our own being’ (ibid.). Bauman further writes,

‘When it comes to entering and staying in a relationship, fear and desire fight to get the better of each other. We earnestly struggle for the security that only a committed relationship (and yes, committed for a long term!) may bring and yet we fear a victory no less than defeat. Our attitudes to human bonds tend to be painfully ambivalent, and the chances of resolving that ambivalence are nowadays slim (ibid., p.69).

This is how self-identification and self-identity becomes a problem for most people nowadays.

Thirdly, not only are the intimate relationships and thus self-identity influenced by no ‘long-term commitment’ due to changing social settings. Modern people’s character and thus their personal lives are corroded by it. Sennett focuses on the challenges posed by modern work patterns that affect modern people’s work ethic. Sennett analyses the new economy feeds on experience that drifts in time, from place to place, from job to job. Short-term capitalism threatens to corrode an individual’s character, ‘particularly those qualities of character which bind human beings to one another and furnishes
each with a sense of sustainable self’ (Sennett 1989, pp.26-27). Character like commitment, loyalty and trust which need a long time to develop are corroded by ‘no long term’. This is a new way of organizing time, especially working time, in order to keep up with rapid changes of ‘consumer-driven’ market. As he writes, ‘’no long term’ disorients action over the longer term, loosens bonds of trust and commitment, and divorces will from behaviour’ (ibid., p.31). This not only weakens the traditional work ethic but also directly affects individuals’ emotional lives outside the workplace.

However, as we have seen in previous sections, there are different observations on how the problem of identity can be solved. For Giddens, people nowadays could make decision by themselves to adopt different life styles, which suggests they can choose who to be and how to act. But this process could only be realized through the ‘project of reflexivity of the self’ and by ensuring that self-identity is organized and reorganized through the calculative weighing up of opportunities and risks. For Bauman, in a liquid modern world, people are floating on the wave of changeable and short-lived opportunities (see Bauman 2000, 2004). Since any long-term commitment to a particular identity is ‘meaningless’, one is inclined to swap one identity chosen once and for all, for a ‘network of connections’ (Bauman 2004, p.31). So, one tends to seek ‘redemption in quantity’ for the unhappiness of quality. Bauman writes,

‘Once you have done it, however, entering a commitment and making it secure appear even more difficult (and so more off-putting, even frightening) than before. You now miss the skills that would or at least could make it work. Being on the move, once a privilege and an achievement, is then not longer a matter of choice: it now becomes “a must”. Keep up the speed, once an exhilarating adventure, turns into an exhausting chore’ (ibid).
Thus Bauman thinks people can only adopt Don Juan’s strategy: ‘finishing quickly and starting from a new beginning’ (ibid., p.53). From the above, although identity is no longer a ‘given’ and ‘solid’ thing nowadays, one can see both theorists have different analyses of identity in the present. To put it in a nutshell, while Giddens still thinks people can make and remake their identity by themselves in an attempt to keep its continuity and cohesion, Bauman asserts in our age identity is for wearing and showing, not for keeping and storing (see Bauman 2004).

Fourthly, both think that to have and realize an identity is largely subject to an individuals’ resources in today’s settings. Giddens contends that although both the poor and the rich face the universal phenomenon of decision making in terms of lifestyles, the lack of resources ‘might make these tasks become an almost insupportable burden, a source of despair rather than self-enrichment’ (ibid., p.86). For Bauman, ‘Selecting the means required to achieve an alternative identity of your choice is no longer a problem (if you have enough money, that is, to purchase its obligatory paraphernalia) (see Bauman 2004). Consequently, Bauman suggests that having an identity under liquid settings is largely related to person's resources. For the rich and /or privileged, identity might be treated as commodity to buy and throw away. Meanwhile for the poor, identity might be a thing of 'luxury'. The rich feel the agony of countless decision-making and are not able to stop to choose, but the poor might have to survive the hopelessness of not having a desired identity in the same world as the affluent because of the lack of resources. Thus, although in different ways, modern persons might not only suffer the burden of decision-making before indefinite and confused choices, they also need ‘lifelong attention, continuous vigilance, a huge and growing volume of resources and incessant effort with no hope of respite’ (Bauman 2004, p.82).
Fifthly, globalization can also be seen as a key factor in order to explain how identity has become a problem. For Giddens, globalization *deskills* the day-to-day life, yet new/modern knowledge of everyday life is also re-appropriated by lay actors. However, according to Giddens, ‘few individuals sustain an unswerving trust in the systems of technical knowledge that impinge on them, and everyone, whether consciously or not selects among the competing possibilities of action that such system (or disengagement from them) provide’ (Giddens 1990, p.23). This is how ‘the reflexivity of the self’ expresses itself, that is, ‘a phenomenon which, on the level of the individual, like the broader institutions of modernity, balances opportunity and potential catastrophe in equal measure’ (ibid., p.34). For Bauman, however, globalization in liquid modernity not only means that at an individual level, ‘a cohesive, firmly riveted and solidly constructed identity would be a burden, a constraint and a limitation on the freedom to choose before indefinite possibilities’ (Bauman 2004, p.53). It also means that at group level, people attempt to find protection from the ‘globalizing winds’, as the nation-state is unable to provide it. According to Bauman, this is one reason why the different kinds of movements seeking community recognition are common these days. Modernization facilitates migration, and migration accelerates pluralisation, and pluralisation in one area complicates communication and interaction. Then, the awareness of differences and recognition between groups looms large. This could also be one explanation for how identity, particularly community identity, has become a heated issue in nowadays.

### 2.8 Critical Observations

#### 2.8.1 Different ‘anxieties’, different identity problems

As has been shown above, the nature of self and identity have undergone massive changes under the dynamic socio-economic transformation that
emerged from modernization in the latter part of the 20th century in modern societies. This is the social backdrop against which the problem of identity becomes a concern among different disciplines nowadays. Giddens highlights anxieties about the ‘existential issues’ of being a person arisen from the lack of sense of security caused by external changes in the late modern settings and regards it as a main factor why identity has become problem. Bauman’s argument relating to the problem of identity seems to emerge from his critical examination of radical individualism and agonizing conditions of individual’s freedom brought by the transformation in fluid modernity.

However, one must note that the two theorists talk about different kinds of ‘anxiety’ within the individual. As has been shown, Giddens and Bauman set their argument about identity against post-traditional settings. They agree that there has been a profound socio-economic change to various aspects of the human condition in Western society in the latter part of last century. However, they hold different views about the degree and range of that change. This might be the point where they part company in terms of the ‘anxiety’ they focus on. For Giddens, anxieties are caused by rapid external changes, and they are about existential issues in terms of the ontological security of a person. Specifically, it is about the continuity of self-identity, i.e. ‘the persistence of feelings of personhood in a continuous self and body’ (Giddens 1991, p.55). For Bauman, the anxieties are about the agony of individuals’ never-ending desire to choose in front of a surfeit of possibilities for choice. That is, to have an identity becomes an unfulfilled ‘task’ to perform for any individual. By using his own resources and he/she has to be responsible for the consequence of performing him/herself. If the speed and depth of changes brought out by modernity are as radical and violent as Bauman analyses, we may find that his analyses on the problem of identity goes further than that offered by Giddens.
2.8.2 Criticisms towards Giddens’s analyses: radical individualism and hidden power

First, Giddens’s notion of self as a reflexive project suggests an active agency. When one examines this ‘human agency’ about the individual’s self at a deeper level, he or she would find that Giddens’s over-emphasis on individualistic endeavour to confront, mitigate and eliminate the personal anxiety brought by late modernity actually leaves heavy burden on the self of the individual. It could make the individual suffer more. It is exactly here we can see the importance of Bauman’s criticism on radical individualism. Since the anxiety concerning the problem of identity nowadays is the consequence of modernization as individualization, it is not fair to simply put the responsibility to solve this problem on the shoulders of individuals. There should be an urgent need to make the public undertake or at least share the responsibility to ease the pain of the miserable ‘modern’ self. What Giddens makes invisible by his analysis on ‘reflexivity of the self’ has been sharply made visible by Bauman’s insightful comments on ‘life politics’:

‘When public politics sheds its functions and life-politics takes over, problems encountered by individuals de jure in their efforts to become individuals de facto turn out to be notoriously non-additive and non-cumulative, thereby denuding the public sphere of all substance except of the site where private worries are confessed and put on public display’ (Bauman 2000, p.51-52).

Secondly, one also needs to realize that the ‘human agent’ suggested by Giddens is ‘de jure’ by nature. It is an ability to reflexively adapt, alter and sustain the ‘self’ of an individual according to the endless changes happened in the external world. In other words, this ‘human agent’ is triggered by coercion of external forces rather than emerges from his/her real own will. It is
not an autonomy de facto, i.e. the exercise of free will, to ‘gain control over their fate and make the choices they truly desire’ (ibid., p.39). Instead, the individual under today’s late modern circumstances in Giddens’s mind seems to be an individual de jure.

Bauman’s view on liquid modernity and its negative impacts on the individual mirrors modern Western social conditions to a great extent. He sharply suggests capitalism as an invisible control produced by liquid modernity over the conditions of individual’s life and the side effects resulting from this control. The surfeit of choices existed in present settings is a freedom de jure and is actually the source of agony for any individual to suffer. Although the countless choices derived from rapid and ephemeral changes seem to be the enjoyments of freedom, they lead to confusion, anxiety and risks. People change from one identity to another through the purchase of ‘supermarket of identities’ as Bauman’s metaphor suggests. In Bauman’s line of argument, one finally could see that the identity under a liquid setting has lost identity’s original meaning. Identity is no longer about the true aspect of selfhood or a coherent ‘sense of self’ or a sameness of self-identification, but is about ‘things’ offered and displayed by an invisible power for choice. Bauman perceptibly suggests that modern people’s identity is increasingly shaped and determined by external force, rather than by true human ‘agency’, which is the autonomy de facto to form their own identity and control their lives at their own will.

Bauman’s calling for the urgent need for learning about citizenship to bridge that gap between the conditions of individual de jure and their chances to become individual de facto provides us with a tool to change the situation. This can be done by turning an individual’s privatized worries, fragmented anxieties and weak self-assertion to the united human condition for
cooperation and solidity in order to tackle our problem collectively. Given that
the need to relearn forgotten citizen skills and reappropriate lost citizen tools
is the only way to fill that gap (see Bauman 2000), it meanwhile reminds the
public of the necessity to rethink the meaning of the democracy education in
Western societies nowadays.

Thirdly, Giddens’s idea of ‘reflexive project of the self’ implies individuals’
adaptation and flexibility to the external changes. Sennett demonstrates the
side effects of being a flexible person in his work *The Corrosion of Character*
(Sennett 1999). He argues that today people live in conditions of ‘flexible
capitalism’, where ‘rigid forms of bureaucracy are under attack, as are the evils
of blind routine’ (Sennett 1998, p.9). This flexibility arouses anxiety. As he
writes, ‘people do not know what risks will pay off, what paths to pursue’
(ibid.). Sennett also points out the consequences of the loss of authority for
the individual, especially in the workplace, where the ‘the ironic man’ will
appear. Sennett thinks Richard Rorty writes well when describing this kind
of irony as a state of mind in which people are ‘never quite able to take
themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they
describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency
and fragility of their final “vocabularies, and thus of their selves”’(Richard
Rorty quoted by Sennett 1998, p.116). Sennett also holds that the rules and
authority of the past are actually substituted by the new order and new control,
which are hard to understand. As he writes, ‘the new capitalism is an illegible
regime of power’ (ibid., p.9). Therefore, ‘Flexibility begets disorder, but not
freedom from restraint’ (ibid., p.59).
2.8.3 Criticism towards Bauman

Nevertheless, one might criticize Bauman on the grounds that his view is too pessimistic. What he described as the problem of identity seems to suggest that there is no longer the true existence of person’s identity in a present-day setting. I partly agree with this criticism because I think Bauman might overestimate the rapidity and range of changes brought by liquid modernity and their impacts on personal identity. He seems to suggest that changes of identity are so rapid and choices of identity are so many that the modern person has no time to pause to think, to reflect and or to maintain a continuity of identity in liquid settings. It might be still early to deny the continuity of identity at present. I am sceptical towards the idea that identity is like a ‘commodity’, which could be quickly possessed and quickly thrown away in today’s Western societies. Instead, I would argue that the identity one holds today in a large sense can be understood as a certain sense of oneself with his/her self-interpretations and the interpretations from others to him/herself at present, together with traces of his/her past and signs of his/her future. I agree with what Charles Taylor has said, ‘In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going’ (Taylor 1989, p.47).

2.9. Implications for lifelong learning and some criticisms

Both theorists’ thoughts on the problems of identity imply that learning has become a lifelong project for any individual of today. Given that Giddens’s theory of self-identity is the self reflexively understood by person in terms of his/her biography/autobiography, one can link the ‘reflexivity’ to lifelong learning by saying that individuals are autonomous to learn over their lifespan. This might be achieved by continually thinking and rethinking about individual issues relevant to who I am and how do I act in relation to social life.
in one’s life course. Giddens’s idea about a ‘Human agent’ can be specifically considered as a certain learning autonomy to adapt oneself to the everlasting changing settings.

The late modernist view of routine ‘reflexivity’ can be seen as a kind of ‘permanent learning’ and has been considered to have a direct relation to a new mode of lifelong learning (e.g., Hake 1998). Although this view has even been regarded as a central factor in ‘grasping the underlying function and place of lifelong learning in contemporary societies’ (Field 2000, p.62), the lifelong learning underpinned by this view has aroused some criticisms. For example, to what extent the claim that the self has becomes a reflexive project is true and universal still requires further empirical evidence.

Two further key criticisms have also emerged in recent years. Firstly, it has been pointed out by some that the act of reflexivity of an individual to make and remake his/her self-identity is mainly being mobilized by rapid social changes (e.g., Beck 1992, Hake 1998). But social changes brought about by modernity could also be seen as an ideological agenda, that is, capitalism—one of the great driving forces in the expansion of modernity. The late modernist view of an institutional reflexivity of modernity leads to the understanding that modern people must continually make and remake their self-identity in order to update themselves in the rapid changing late modern environment. However, it could be argued that what underlies this idea might be the demands of the capitalism, which desperately require more flexible human labour power. This situation will expect individuals to shape and reshape themselves continuously throughout their lives in order to meet the endless need for flexible positions and high production. To do this is also to stimulate a consuming appetite for a diversity of ‘identities’ for the benefit of the free
market. In this understanding, we can see the assumption that a late modernist view of reflexivity of the self, or the power to motivate people to learn to reshape themselves continually, is actually based on the agenda of commodification and consumerism. Learning to make and remake one’s identity in order to adapt oneself to the rapidly changing social settings which seems to be everyone’s project of self-actualisation is in fact a duty for something unseen. Such lifelong learning is a ‘knowledge economy’ and a ‘learning economy’, notions which have been criticized by many (e.g., Edwards 1997; Field 2000; Biesta 2006a, 2006b).

Secondly, one consequence of reflexivity of the self in a late modernist view has been criticized for leading to radical ‘individualism’. Giddens has been attacked by many on his magnification of personal power in the making and remaking self-identity. He seems to assume that every modern individual has to and is able to make and remake different new self-identities just to adapt to changing nature of the late modern social settings and empower themselves for self-actualisation. But if self is understood as a reflexive project in such a normative way, then it seems that it is every individual’s responsibility to make and remake his/her self-identity. If one fails to do so or does not do so sufficiently, it is again the individual himself/herself that should take the responsibility. Any individual him/herself has to learn to make choices in order to shape and reshape his/her self-identity, taking all the responsibility to learn to have a certain kind of right identity because it is the result of his/her own choice. This has to be achieved without finding any public place to resolve personal agony caused by the endless choices he/she has to make in order to keep pace with ‘modernity’. As Bauman says, this only leads to privatized human agony (see Bauman 2000). It is here we can see how Bauman’s argument differs from Giddens’s theory. Lifelong learning under
this radicalized ‘individualism’ is a kind of agony resulting from endless choices that any individual has to make him/herself and endless uncertainties and problems that an individual has to suffer privately.

Given that Bauman mentions the importance of citizenship as a tool to bridge the gap between individual de jure and individual de facto, learning about citizenship and democracy should be included in lifelong learning for the common interest of the members of the ‘good society’ and ‘just society’. As he writes,

‘The individual de jure cannot turn into the individual de facto without first becoming the citizen. There are no autonomous individuals without an autonomous society, and the autonomy of society requires deliberate and perpetually deliberated self-constitution, something that may be only a shared accomplishment of its members’ (Bauman 2000, p.40).

This is why there is an urgent call for ‘democratic learning’, which has been raised to counter ‘individualistic learning’ in recent years (see e.g. Bauman 2000, 2005; Biesta 2006a).

Likewise, from Bauman’s argument about identity, one can exactly find the fundamental necessity of lifelong learning. He suggests that one needs to see him/herself as a smart missile, in order to adapt to the liquid settings where everything is uncertain, and targets continuously change. Thus the only thing one can do is to learn continually throughout one’s life. As he writes,

‘More to the point, in the liquid modern setting education and learning, to be of any use, must be continuous and indeed life-long. No other kind of education and/or learning is conceivable; “formation” of selves or personalities is unthinkable in any other
fashion but that of an on-going and perpetually unfinished re-formation’ (Bauman 2005, p.19).

2.10. Reflections on the notion of reflexivity in relation to identity

It could be argued that these criticisms levelled at Giddens’s notion of reflexivity do not mean the notion ‘reflexivity’ has no worth at all in relation to lifelong learning. Instead, I think this notion is closely bound up with learning in relation to personal identity. First, learning about personal identity is not only learning about self-assertion and being an individual *de facto* with the support of collectivism and democracy. It could be argued that learning about personal identity is also learning about self-understanding and personal development with the help of self-examination and self-interpretation. It is also about learning concerning how an individual as a unique being lives with what and who are others in the intersubjective world. All these dimensions are related to learning about the human being him/herself, which largely relies on one’s reflexivity. Therefore, in my view, learning and lifelong learning that is relevant to personal identity cannot be sufficient without the aid of the notion of reflexivity.

The second reason that the notion of ‘reflexivity’ is important is that, from my observations, I believe this notion is closely related to the narrative of one’s identity. While both Giddens and Bauman agree that identity today is not something that is ‘given’, but becomes a ‘project’ that has to be fulfilled by a person her/himself, they hold different views on narratives of identity. Giddens maintains that an identity can still be made and remade self-reflexively through the construction of individual’s personal life story. This at least suggests that person’s identity can be seen through his or her coherent narratives of their life-story. However, Bauman holds that identity has become ‘an unfulfilled project’, since any modern person lives in a state of
endless becoming—a selfhood which is never finished. Under these conditions, modern persons find it hard to clarify coherent life narratives and coherent narratives of personal identity. Moreover, such non-coherent narratives produce confusion. Bauman’s view agrees with Sennett’s argument: ‘what is missing between the polar opposites of drifting experience and static assertion is a narrative which could organize his conduct’ (Sennett 1998, p.30), since ‘the experience of disjointed time threatening the ability of people to form their characters into sustained narratives’ (ibid., p.31).

The absence of such narrative causes anxieties about the future. According to Sennett, ‘Narratives are more than simple chronicles of events; they give shape to the formal movement of time, suggesting reasons why things happen, showing their consequences’ (ibid., p.30). In this sense, any life narrative is not only related to an individual’s past, it is also concerned with people’s thoughts on the future. As, Sennett points out, ‘the dilemma of how to organize a life narrative is partly clarified by probing how, in today’s capitalism, people cope with the future’ (Sennett 1998, p.177). These observations make me think if narrative is considered to be a life story one tells about him/herself, and this story is an articulation of one’s personal identity, we cannot ignore the notion of ‘reflexivity’ since one’s life story is fundamentally constructed through the act of reflexivity.

The critical question is how we should understand the notion of ‘reflexivity’. As I have shown above, Giddens’s notion of ‘reflexivity’ in relation to identity is problematic in that he based this notion on the assumption of radical individualism. This puts the implication for learning in relation to identity in a difficult position. Next, I wish to explore different theories of identity, not only for the aims I presented in Chapter 1, but also for seeking alternative
views on reflexivity in relation to identity and the role of learning inherent in those views. I also hope to conduct a further investigation into the question about the role that narrative plays in understanding identity.
Chapter 3  Paul Ricoeur’s view on personal identity and narrative identity

To say self is not to say I. The I is posited—or is deposed. The self is implied reflexively in operations, the analysis of which precedes the return towards this self. Upon this dialectic of analysis and reflection is grafted that of idem and ipse. Finally, the dialectic of the same and the other crowns the first two dialectics.

(Ricoeur 1992, p.18)

...personal identity can be articulated only in the temporal dimension of human existence.

(Ricoeur 1992, p.114)

Subjects recognize themselves in the stories they tell about themselves.

(Ricoeur 1988, p.247)

3.1 Introduction

Personal identity as ‘narrative identity’ has been studied by many theorists (e.g., Arendt 1958, MacIntyre 1981, Taylor 1989, Ricoeur 1984,1988,1991, 1992). In this chapter I will focus on a discussion of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s theory of identity and his theory of narrative identity. Here, I endeavour to find out the roles of learning in his theories and, in particular, pay some attention to aspects of lifelong learning in my discussion of those roles. The main reason of focusing on Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity is that he deals with paradoxes of personal identity by putting a considerable emphasis on temporal factors and on the notion of personal identity. He reveals the complex dialectics between sameness, selfhood and others on temporal
dimension, from which the concept of personal identity can be better articulated and theorized. Stressing the temporal dimension of personal identity in the dialects between sameness and selfhood makes Ricoeur develop his theory of *narrative identity*. This theory permits the possibility for allowing human beings to come to terms with the temporality of their existence throughout their lives, from which the ‘lifelong’ dimension of the meaning of life can be examined. The significance of the notion of narrative identity not only lies in its structural function as a mediator in the dialectic relationship between identity as sameness and identity as selfhood at conceptual level. It also lies in one’s self-understanding of one’s life as human experience. This is because one’s recognition of his/her personal identity through narrative of one’s life can be regarded as one’s understanding of the meaning of his/her life and of being a certain kind of person through one’s interpretation of his/her life story. This is an approach that is rooted in hermeneutic philosophy. All these aspects of Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity are therefore of great value in the exploration of the role of learning and aspects of lifelong learning in relation to one’s personal identity.

This chapter will start from a general discussion of a conceptual paradox of personal identity and how Ricoeur responds to the issue. Then this chapter will be developed by following three modes of dialectics contained in Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity. Firstly, I will clarify and interpret in detail Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity by focusing on the difference between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity and the dialectics between them. Then, I will move to a section that focuses on his theory of narrative identity. Here I will distinguish between the notion of ‘narrative identity’ at a conceptual level and ‘narrative identity’ in a practical category. The notion of narrative identity at conceptual level suggested by Ricoeur is required in order to resolve the
paradox of personal identity through narrative’s function as a mediator between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity. The notion of narrative identity in a practical category is one’s personal identity identified through one’s self-interpretation of one’s life story. Secondly, I will demonstrate another dialectic relationship that exists between *selfhood* and *others*. Thirdly, I will reveal the dialectic between sameness and others, a dialectic which spans the first two. Finally, I will present my thoughts on the role of learning and aspects of lifelong learning implicated in different modes of reflexivity that have emerged from the three kinds of dialectics present in Ricoeur’s theories of personal identity.

### 3.2 Paradoxes of personal identity

The British philosopher John Locke first revealed the aporetic character of the question of identity. In the chapter titled ‘Identity and Diversity’ in his work *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (2d ed., 1694), Locke introduces a concept of *identity*. After having said that identity results from a comparison, Locke introduces the singular idea of the identity of a *thing* with itself (identity as ‘sameness with itself’): ‘When therefore we demand whether anything be the same or no, it refers always to something that existed such a time in such a place, which it was certain at that instant, was the same with itself’ (Locke 1964 [1694], p.207 cited in Ricoeur 1992, p.125). But when Locke reaches the notion of *personal identity*, which he does not confuse with the identity of *man*, he assigns ‘sameness with itself’ alleged by his general definition of identity to *instantaneous reflection*. For Locke, reflection can be extended from the instant to the duration (of time) which means the retrospective expansion of reflection as far as it can extend in the past can be seen as one’s memory. So, Locke contends that personal identity depends on *consciousness*, not on substance. Because of the transformation of reflection into memory as the same continued
consciousness, this ‘sameness with itself’ in a person can thus be said to extend in time. Locke then contends that personal identity is the ‘sameness with itself’ of a person in terms of one’s same extended reflection as the same memory.

Locke then invented a criterion of identity, i.e. mental identity vs. corporeal identity, from which discussions about the paradoxes within various criteria of identity appeared from that time on. For instance, Locke offers the example of a prince whose memory is transplanted into the body of a cobbler. The question he raises is: Does the latter become the prince whom he remembers having been, or does he remain the cobbler whom other people continue to observe? Locke, consistent with his general definition, decides in favour of the first solution, that is, memory decides who a person is. Thus the era called ‘puzzling cases’ unforeseeably began. Locke’s successors who are more sensitive to the differences between these two criteria of identity even hold that the issue is not merely paradoxical but also undecidable. Their debates created by the hypothesis of transplanting one and the same soul/brain into another body began to appear more undetermined rather than simply paradoxical. The modern philosopher Derek Parfit even concludes from the indecidability of the puzzling cases (his version of a puzzling case was teletransporting a person’s brain to his replica in another planet) that the question posed about paradox of the criteria for personal identity was itself empty (see Parfit 1986 cited in Ricoeur 1992, p.35).

David Hume, another British philosopher, posits identity as sameness in a more direct way in his work A Treatise of Human Nature, Book 1, part 4, section 6 (1739), ‘We have a distinct idea of an object that remains invariable and uninterrupted through a supposed variation of time; and this idea we call that of identity or sameness’ (Hume 2000 [1739], p.165). But when he moves from
things and animate beings to self, he concludes that personal identity is an illusion. As an empiricist, he based every real idea on a corresponding impression. Thus he argued, 'For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself at any time without a perception, and can never observe any thing but the perception' (ibid. emph. in original). Hume suggested that each of us is ‘nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement’ (ibid.). So, for Hume, the idea of personal identity as sameness of consciousness of the self is an illusion. It is no surprise that Hume reached such a conclusion since his assumption of the definition of personal identity is confined to identity as sameness, and was unable to realize that personal identity could also be seen as identity as selfhood.

Faced with this age-old problem of personal identity, Ricoeur suggests that it is exactly because of the lack of a guidance in terms of distinguishing two models of identity, i.e. idem-identity (identity as sameness) and ipse-identity (identity as selfhood) that the concept of personal identity become such a difficult and paradoxical problem as mentioned above. In response to this problem he asserts that if the concept of personal identity limits itself to the world of sameness, one will find nothing in one’s self. For Ricoeur, modern theorists’ attempts to distinguish between two criteria of identity are problematic. This is because for them, it seems that memory is totally separated from body, as though the expression of memory were not itself a bodily phenomenon. Even though some theorists realize that a distinction exists between idem and ipse, they neglect to take account of the fact that there is a dialectic relationship between them. As the critique Ricoeur offers to Parfit’s analysis says,
‘...these analyses are situated on a plane where identity can signify only sameness, to the express exclusion of any distinction between sameness and selfhood, and hence of any dialectic – narrative or other – between sameness and selfhood (Ricoeur 1992, p.130).

He further points out that Parfit’s conclusions could only be valid if one holds that identity merely means sameness. Rather than following Parfit’s conclusion that the question posed was itself empty, Ricoeur claims that unanswerable paradoxes may still be there in need of an answer. He further claims, ‘This dilemma disappears if we substitute for identity understood in the sense of being the same (idem), identity understood in the sense of oneself as self-same [soi-même]’ (Ricoeur 1988, p.246).

In the following sections, I will clarify in detail how Ricoeur responds to the paradoxes of the personal identity by presenting his theory of personal identity and his theory of narrative identity as a solution to the problem.

3.3 Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity

Ricoeur argues that what is at stake in the very problem of identity when applied to a person is the confrontation between two major uses of the concept of identity: idem-identity and ipse-identity. On one side, personal identity is identity as sameness (Latin idem, German Gleichheit, French memete). On the other, personal identity is identity as selfhood (Latin ipse, German Selbstheit, French ipseîte). It is essential to distinguish between these two modes of identity. Ricoeur stresses, ‘selfhood, I have repeatedly affirmed, is not sameness’ (ibid., p.116). Identity as sameness can be obviously perceived in the sense of physical identity of a person, e.g. sameness of physical appearance and body, under the criteria of permanence in time (see, Ricoeur 1992, p.116). However, Ricoeur argues that identity as sameness can also be found in the
field of selfhood expressed as character by following the same principle of permanence in time. Further, identity as selfhood is also a mode of being through permanence in time expressed as self-constancy. What Ricoeur reveals here is actually his response to the paradoxes of personal identity by linking the temporality of body and the temporality of self of the person. He argues that the difference between identity as sameness and identity as selfhood ‘is raised to the level of problem only after the temporal implications have themselves moved to the forefront’ (see ibid., p.116).

It is worth noting two difficulties here. The first difficulty is how exactly to distinguish between idem-identity and ipse-identity. This difficulty is related to a question of how to justify the status of idem-identity that is found in the field of selfhood, i.e. is it something one possess like sameness of physical identity, for instance, appearance, organs or whole body? The second difficulty is how idem-identity is related to ipse-identity in the field of selfhood in terms of permanence in time if idem-identity can also be found in the selfhood. Both difficulties touch on the paradoxes of personal identity. For Ricoeur, concerning personal identity in selfhood, there exist not only differences between idem-identity and ipse-identity, but also a relationship between the two, that is, the dialectic of sameness (idem) and selfhood (ipse).

3.3.1 The differences between idem-identity and ipse-identity

In Ricoeur’s analysis, permanence in time is posited as the highest principle for any criteria relating to personal identity, which opposes the principle that is changing and variable. Permanence in time presents itself in two different modes in identity as sameness and identity as selfhood, respectively.
Idem-identity is identity as sameness. This notion is not difficult to understand in terms of permanence in time. Ricoeur thinks permanence in time holds the dominant place in sameness. In sameness, the first component we find is numerical identity. It denotes oneness, ‘one and the same’: the contrary is plurality (i.e. not one but two or several). Here, Ricoeur equates numerical identity with the notion of identification: ‘understood in the sense of the re-identification of the same, which makes cognition recognition: the same thing twice, n times’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.116). One thus can understand numerical identity as sameness that is permanent in time. The second component of identity is qualitative identity, which denotes extreme resemblance, e.g., \( x \) and \( y \) are interchangeable with no noticeable difference. This component corresponds with the operation of substitution without semantic loss. These two components of identity are irreducible to one another. However, one of the weaknesses of criterion of sameness, according to Ricoeur, is that ‘time is implied in the series of occurrences of the same thing that the re-identification of the same can provoke hesitation, doubt, or contestation’ (ibid., p.116). So, because a great distance in time exists between any series of occurrences this situation can cause uncertainties in terms of sameness. Therefore one needs to seek another criterion, which is the third component of a notion of identity as sameness. This component is uninterrupted continuity ‘between the first and the last stage in the development of what we consider to be the same individual’ (ibid., p.117). Ricoeur explains the function of this criterion as following, ‘This criterion is predominant whenever growth or aging operate as factors of dissemblance and, by implication, of numerical diversity’ (ibid.). This is particularly the case when idem-identity refers to material or physical identity, e.g. one adult might look different compared with the his/her portrait in the picture taken during his/her childhood. Hence, Ricoeur considers that the threat to the identity as sameness cannot be totally dissipated if one does
not posit a principle of \textit{permanence in time} at the base of \textit{similitude} and of the \textit{uninterrupted continuity}.

So, conceptually, the sameness of a person can be identified according to the principles of \textit{numerical identity}, \textit{qualitative identity}, \textit{uninterrupted continuity} and \textit{permanence in time}, which defines sameness. Obviously, permanence in time is not difficult to understand with respect to the identity as \textit{sameness (idem-identity)} of a person in terms of \textit{material} or we might say, the physical things, for example, sameness of a person in terms of one’s appearances or body over time. In this sense, \textit{idem}-identity can be seen as something ‘given’, a ‘thing’ one possesses. Here, sameness as a ‘thing’ changes or does not change on its own without the interference of the action initiated by the self. But in Ricoeur’s view, the notion of \textit{idem}-identity can also be seen in the field of selfhood, an immaterial field, which is presented as \textit{sameness of the self}. Consequently, is \textit{idem}-identity in an immaterial sense or more precisely, in selfhood, still the same ‘thing’ on its own? Before answering this question, we need first to see how \textit{idem}-identity can be seen in the field of selfhood.

\textit{Ipse}-identity is identity as selfhood, individuality or distinctiveness. Following this definition, it would be difficult to understand the claim that sameness can be found in selfhood. Ricoeur’s in-depth analysis suggests it is exactly the \textit{temporality} of the self that turns \textit{ipse}-identity into a difficult problem. As he claims, ‘it is with the question of permanence in time that the confrontation between two versions of identity becomes a genuine problem for the first time’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.116). In other words, it is exactly in the field of selfhood that permanence in time turns out to be a difficult question and presents itself as two different \textit{forms} of permanence in time.
Ricoeur suggests that although *idem* and *ipse* are different, they intersect in the temporal dimension, that is, in *permanence in time*, in the field of the selfhood. He argues that personal identity in the field of selfhood should be seen as two different modes of identity underpinned by two different modes of permanence in time. One mode of identity is the identity of *character* in the selfhood backed by permanence in time in the sense of *idem*, which is the identification of the *sameness of a self* over time. In this mode of permanence in time, *ipse* is overlapped by and accords with *idem*. So, it is exactly in the identity of *character* that we find sameness, *idem*-identity. The other mode of identity is the identity as *self-constancy* backed by permanence in time in the sense of *ipse*, which is a kind of self-maintenance that one exerts over oneself over time. So, we may say that the latter mode of permanence *in time* can be read as permanence *through* time. Ricoeur suggests that it is exactly when the two modes of identity are examined according to the principle of permanence in time that we can find, on the one hand, permanence in time of the self as character expresses the mutual overlapping between *idem* and *ipse*. On the other hand, we can find the *differences* between perseverance of character and the constancy of the self in promising displays the *fundamental differences* between the identity of *idem* and the identity of *ipse* in the self (see ibid., p.118).

But the immediate question is what exactly the fundamental difference is between the perseverance of character and the self-constancy in promise? To give a satisfactory answer to this question we need have a deep analysis of Ricoeur’s notion of the self in the sense of *idem* and in the sense of *ipse*.

In clarifying his conception of self, Ricoeur distances himself from both the Cartesian conception of cogito and anti-Cartesian conception of cogito. He argues that in the Descartian conception of cogito, the ego, the ‘I’, is posited, independent of its body and body’s spatiotemporal setting, that is,
independent of otherness. In the radical anti-Cartesian conception the cogito is shattered and fragmented. Ricoeur writes,

'To say self is not to say I. The I is posited—or is deposed. The self is implied reflexively in operations, the analysis of which precedes the return towards this self. Upon this dialectic of analysis and reflection is grafted that of idem and ipse. Finally, the dialectic of the same and the other crowns the first two dialectics' (Ricoeur 1992, p.18, emph. in original).

This suggests, for Ricoeur, the self is essentially embodied. It is a matter in the dialectic of idem (the ‘thing’) and ipse (the being). On the one hand, self is both made possible and constituted by its material and cultural situation. But, on the other hand, self is in principle always capable of initiative, of inaugurating something new to change itself. This quotation also suggests that the other than self is constitutive of the self.

If we follow Ricoeur’s suggestion by adding two Latin words idem (meaning ‘same’) and ipse (meaning ‘selfhood’) as qualifiers to the term ‘self’, two new terms of ‘self’ are coined: idem-self and ipse-self. Literally, idem-self refers to sameness of the self, i.e. one and the same self; ipse-self refers to selfhood of the self, e.g. ‘I myself’, ‘he himself’ or ‘she herself’. Ipse-self so conveys the sense of a self’s mineness in each case, like individuality, particularity, uniqueness or distinctiveness initiated by this very self. Ipse-self therefore can be put into a certain category under the notion of ‘subjectivity’, or might amount to the literal meaning of the term ‘each-his-ownness’, as suggested by Spiegelberg in his interpretation of Heidegger’s term ‘Jemeinigkeit’ (Spiegelberg 1984, p.386).

While idem-self expresses the identical, similar or stable dimensions of the self, ipse-self implies the dimensions of acting, initiating and changing of the self that this self exerts reflexively.
For Ricoeur, the differences between idem-self and ipse-self, not only lie in grammatical, epistemological and logical dimensions, but also, more fundamentally, in ontological dimension. Ricoeur stresses that idem-self and ipse-self fundamentally belong to two different modes of beings in terms of the ontology of the self. For Ricoeur, idem-self, i.e. sameness of the self, belongs to the categories of relation, i.e. substance as the first category of relation in Kantian sense. As Kant writes in *Critique of Pure Reason*, ‘All appearances contain the permanent [das Beharrliche] (substance) as the object itself, and the transitory as its mere determination’ (A182, p.212 cited in Ricoeur 1992, p.118n). Thus idem-self is classified by Ricoeur as a mode of being as entities. In this sense, the being of idem-self can be identified or re-identified at different occurrences over time based on the substantiality of a substance or things, both given and manipulable. Ricoeur therefore claims that idem-self as a being can be related to what Heidegger calls Vorhandenheit, a German term which is translated as being-present-at-hand. Wikipedia’s explanation of the term can help us understand it easily: ‘in seeing an entity as present-at-hand, the beholder is concerned only with the bare facts of a thing or a concept, as they are present and in order to theorize about it’ (see Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heideggerian_terminology).

By contrast, the being of ipse-self in Ricoeur’s view can be seen as one of existentials, which belongs to what Heidegger calls the mode of being of Dasein. According to Ricoeur, Heidegger characterizes Dasein by ‘the capacity to question itself as to its own way of being and thus to relate itself to being qua being’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.191). What distinguishes Dasein from other entities is that ‘that entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue, comports itself towards its being as its ownmost possibility’ (Heidegger 1962, p.67). Ipse-
self as a mode of being of *Dasein*, therefore has the capacity to question itself. It can initiate new actions toward the existing self. Thus, Ricoeur concludes that ‘the ontological status of selfhood is therefore solidly based on the distinction between two modes of being, *Dasein* and *Vorhandenheit*’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.309).

Given the ontological differences between *idem*-self and *ipse*-self, personal identity in selfhood can be put under two irreducible headings: *idem*-identity of selfhood and *ipse*-identity of the self, and therefore have two different ontological bases. Since *ipse*-self is a mode of being of *Dasein*, more precisely, *Dasein* as Care as I will show later, the ontological status of *ipse*-identity can be seen as the being as Care intent on maintaining one’s existence expressed in one’s consistent responsibility to others. As Heidegger writes,

‘Ontologically, *Dasein* is in principle different from everything that is present-at-hand or Real. Its “subsistence” [*Bestand*] is not based on the substantiality of a substance but on the “Self-subsistence” [*Selbst-Ständigkeit*] of the existing Self, whose Being has been conceived as care’ (Heidegger 1962, p.351).

Ricoeur explicitly agrees with Heidegger on this point. As he writes, ‘In this regard, Heidegger is right to distinguish the permanence of substance from self-subsistence’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.123). So, it can be seen that permanence in time in pure *ipse*-identity as self-constancy is different from that in character. The act of keeping one’s words given to others, for Ricoeur, ‘appear to stand as a challenge to time, a denial of change even if my desire were to change, even if I were to change my opinion or my inclination, ‘I will hold firm’ (ibid., p.124). This mode of permanence in time in *ipse*-identity therefore implies an act initiated by a person as a Being of self-constancy, in respect of maintaining self-esteem and holding a responsibility to others.
The ontological status of idem-identity needs further analysis. This analysis touches on the first difficulty I mentioned at the beginning of this section. With respect to idem-identity in the sense of physical identity, it implies a form of permanence in time that is reducible to the determination of a substratum. Substratum here can be understood as the substance in which qualities inhere, e.g., invariable structure or organization of a tool. Permanence in time in this sense is the schema in the relational sense which Kant assigns to the category of substance (see ibid., p.117-118). With respect to idem-identity in the field of the self, one gives self an ascription of the character defined by lasting dispositions which include permanence in time as a result of the self’s sedimentation of its action and internalisation of otherness. But this form of permanence in time or, character, can still be reducible to the determination of a substratum. This is because substratum here can still be understood as the invariable qualities of a substance, that is, an immaterial ‘thing’ itself. In this sense, character, like physical identity, can still be classified into the category of substance. In conclusion, idem-identity in the field of selfhood can be seen as character. It is still a ‘thing’ at ontological level. But it is the ‘thing’ belonging to the being of Dasein. As Ricoeur puts it,

‘Character is truly the “what” of the “who”’ and ‘it is a question of the overlapping of the “who” by the “what,” which slips from the question “Who am I?” back to the question “What am I?”’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.122).

Character in this sense is not only a ‘thing’ given, but also a ‘thing’ that can be manipulated.

However, in Ricoeur’s view, idem-identity of the body and idem-identity in the field of the selfhood are not separated, but are engaged with each other. To Ricoeur, self is embodied. It is body’s belonging to someone that enables one to
designate himself or herself as the one whose body this is. The body as my own constitutes one of the components of minenesss, the *ipse* of my self. Also, as I have discussed earlier in this section, Ricoeur considers the self is *embodied* at least because it is a self’s body that makes this very self possible. In addition, the body is a mediator between the self and the spatial world it exists in. As Ricoeur argues, ‘…in virtue of the mediating function of the body as one’s own in the structure of being in the world, the feature of selfhood belonging to corporeality is extended to that of the world as it is *inhabited corporeally*’ (ibid., p.150).

What we can see from the analysis of the difference between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity is that the notion of personal identity should not only be seen in terms of identity as sameness and identity as selfhood, but also be understood as two different beings, both as ‘substances’, the ‘thing’ and as a mode of being of *Dasein*.

### 3.3.2 The dialectic of *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity

According to Ricoeur, when taking into account the notion of character, personal identity in the field of selfhood is constituted by a tie between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity. This touches the second difficulty I mentioned at the beginning of this section, that is, how *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity are related to each other in the field of selfhood. Ricoeur assigns the notions of *character* and *keeping one’s word* to the two poles of two forms of permanence in time as two modes of identity in the field of selfhood respectively. The complexity between two modes of identity in terms of permanence in time shows a *dialectic* relationship. The following diagram presents not only the constitution of the concept of personal identity, but also the dialectic dimensions between the constituents of this concept.
Character can be seen as ‘self-sameness’ in the field of selfhood. It is ‘the set of distinctive marks which permit the re-identification of human individual as being the same’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.119). From this definition, one can perceive both the notion of sameness and the notion of selfhood as distinctiveness. In Ricoeur’s words, character, ‘is the self under the appearances of sameness’ (ibid., p.128). It ‘designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized’ (ibid., p.121, emph. added). He further proposes that there are two forms of lasting dispositions. The first form is habit, which gives the history, the temporality, to character. Habit is something both being formed and already acquired. Ricoeur maintains that subjectivity of the self ‘is neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.32). Rather, subjectivity of the self has a dimension of evolution in the interaction between sedimentation and innovation. Innovation is initiated by the ipseity of the self, the selfhood. Ricoeur writes, ‘...identity in the sense of ipse implies no assertion concerning some unchangeable core of the personality’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.2). Rather, ipse has the potential to give the existing self its unique unilateral ability to initiate new action to itself for certain new possibilities. In the meanwhile, Ricoeur analyses that sedimentation offers selfhood a sort of history, a kind of permanence in time. Here, this mode of permanence in time in selfhood presents itself as an

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**Diagram 1. The constitution and the dialectic of the concept of personal identity**

PERSONAL IDENTITY

Idem-identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character (Narrative identity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ipse-identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-constancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Character can be seen as ‘self-sameness’ in the field of selfhood. It is ‘the set of distinctive marks which permit the re-identification of human individual as being the same’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.119). From this definition, one can perceive both the notion of sameness and the notion of selfhood as distinctiveness. In Ricoeur’s words, character, ‘is the self under the appearances of sameness’ (ibid., p.128). It ‘designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized’ (ibid., p.121, emph. added). He further proposes that there are two forms of lasting dispositions. The first form is habit, which gives the history, the temporality, to character. Habit is something both being formed and already acquired. Ricoeur maintains that subjectivity of the self ‘is neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.32). Rather, subjectivity of the self has a dimension of evolution in the interaction between sedimentation and innovation. Innovation is initiated by the ipseity of the self, the selfhood. Ricoeur writes, ‘...identity in the sense of ipse implies no assertion concerning some unchangeable core of the personality’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.2). Rather, ipse has the potential to give the existing self its unique unilateral ability to initiate new action to itself for certain new possibilities. In the meanwhile, Ricoeur analyses that sedimentation offers selfhood a sort of history, a kind of permanence in time. Here, this mode of permanence in time in selfhood presents itself as an
overlap resulting from a process that innovation is covered by sedimentation, i.e. ‘distinctive signs’ (ipse-identity) is overlapped by sameness of the self (idem-identity in the self) over time (ibid., p.121). So, character can be seen as a history in which sedimentation tends to cover over innovation that preceded it. Therefore, the interaction between sedimentation and innovation entails a process of overlapping of ipse by idem. However, this overlapping does not remove the differences existing between ipse and idem. As Ricoeur writes, ‘my character is me, myself, ipse; but this ipse announces itself as idem’ (ibid.).

The second form of lasting disposition is the set of acquired identifications by which the other enters into the composition of the self-sameness. Ricoeur maintains, ‘the identity of a person or a community is made up of these identifications with values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes, in which the person or the community recognizes itself’ (ibid. emph. in original). Thus, Ricoeur holds, ‘Recognizing oneself in contributes to recognizing oneself by’ (ibid. emph. in original). This kind of identification is the process of assuming otherness as one’s own by identifying with certain values ‘which makes us place a “cause” above our own survival’ (ibid.). Here ipse and idem accord with one another. For Ricoeur, the acquisition of the acquired identification is in fact a process of internalization of something outside (e.g. values, culture or norms) into something inside the self. Internalization thus has an aspect of sedimentation, which implies a mode of permanence in time as well. Acquired identifications therefore are the result of self’s internalisation of moral and cultural norms over time, in which an element of faithfulness or love to oneself as a certain moral/cultural being is contained. This faithfulness ‘turns the character towards fidelity, hence toward maintaining the self ‘(ibid. emph. added). Hence, acquired identifications are largely about one’s moral identity. In Ricoeur’s words, ‘preferences, evaluations, and estimations are stabilized in
such a way that the person is recognized in these dispositions, which may be called evaluative’ (ibid., p.122).

Another model of permanence in time in selfhood is self-constancy. Ricoeur writes,

‘The perseverance of character is one thing, the perseverance of faithfulness to a word that has been given is something else again. The continuity of character is one thing, the constancy of friendship is quite another’ (ibid. p.123).

What Ricoeur tries to stress here is the notion of self-constancy in an ethical dimension. Self-constancy presents itself as ‘keeping one’s word in faithfulness to the word that has been given’ (ibid.). He writes, ‘I see in this keeping the emblematic figure of an identity which is the polar opposite of that depicted by the emblematic figure of character’ (ibid.). ‘Keeping one’s words’ reveals itself as a challenge to time, a denial of change, i.e. no matter what happens to me, ‘I will hold firm’ even if I were to change my opinion or my inclination. Underlying this act is responsibility and care of others through permanence in time. Such responsibility could be derived from the ‘obligation to safeguard the institution of language and to respond to the trust that the other places in my faithfulness’ (ibid., p.124). But as I will clarify in section 7, self-constancy is not merely about the ethical dimension, it is also about the maintenance of oneself underpinned by the care of oneself. In this mode of permanence in time, ipse-identity has no aid or support of the sameness (idem). Rather, self-constancy has something to do with pure ipse-identity, something metaphysical which cannot be ‘inscribed’ as ‘things’, but supported by certain ontological justification of Being as care to itself and ethical justification with respect to others.
Thus appears the dialectic relation between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity. On the one hand, in the identity of character, *ipse*-identity is overlapped by *idem*-identity; on the other hand, *ipse*-identity as self-constancy is pure *ipse*-identity without the aid of *idem*-identity. Also, for Ricoeur, between the sameness of character and self-constancy in promising, or in temporal terms, between these two models of permanence in time, there opens an interval of sense to be filled in. He writes,

‘It is therefore in the sphere of temporality that the mediation is to be sought. Now it is this “milieu” that, in my opinion, the notion of narrative identity comes to occupy’ (ibid., p.124).

According to Ricoeur, the notion of *narrative identity* can be used as mediator between the perseverance of character (sameness) and the constancy of the self in promising (self-constancy). Consequently, he envisages the function of narrative identity exists between two limits:

‘Having thus situated it in this interval, we will not be surprised to see narrative identity oscillate between two limits: at lower limit, where permanence in time expresses the confusion of *idem* and *ipse*; and an upper limit, where the *ipse* poses the question of its identity without the aid and support of the *idem’ (ibid.).

But what is exactly *narrative identity*? How can it be mediated between identity as sameness and identity as selfhood? These are questions that the following sections will discuss.

3.4 Narrative identity as a solution to the paradoxes of personal identity

The term ‘narrative identity’ should be distinguished between narrative identity at a conceptual level and narrative identity as a practical category. In this section, I will focus on the former and the latter will be discussed in
section 3.5.. It is exactly narrative identity at a conceptual level that Ricoeur uses to resolve the paradoxes of personal identity. In order to investigate how the notion of narrative identity as a concept mediates between identity as sameness and identity as selfhood, there is firstly a need to interpret his theory of narrative since narrative identity is a corollary of the contribution of narrative theory to the notion of personal identity.

3.4.1 Ricoeur’s theory of narrative

Ricoeur’s theory of narrative is a result of his study of the relation between time and narrative. He proposes to use narrative to respond the aporia of the experience of time, i.e., between phenomenological time and cosmological time. However, there is an impasse where both mutually occlude each other to the very extent that they imply each other. After conducting a complicated structural analysis of narrative by linking narrative to the concept of time, he concludes that there is a dialectic relation between time and narrative: ‘time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience’ (Ricoeur 1984, p.3).

Ricoeur develops his narrative theory of Threefold Mimesis. This is based on Augustine’s theory of the Threefold Presents, a theory of time, and Aristotle’s theories of plot in Poetics. Mimesis is a key concept in Aristotle’s Poetics. For Ricoeur, one major use of this concept is to mean ‘imitation or representation of action’ (ibid., p.33). According to Aristotle, ‘the imitation of action is the Plot’ (cited in Ricoeur 1984, p.34). So, Mimesis is closely connected with the concept of plot, or Muthos, namely, ‘the organization of the events’ (ibid.). I will briefly introduce Threefold Mimesis as following while stressing its relation to temporality.
According to Ricoeur, *Mimesis 1* is the pre-understanding of the world of action, which is also termed as ‘prefiguration’. If it is true that the plot is an imitation of action, the capacity for identifying action by means of its structural features (i.e., the conceptual network of the semantics of action expressed in the ability to raise questions of who, how, why, with whom, against whom in respect of any action) is required. Next, if imitating is elaborating an articulated significance of some action, an aptitude for identifying symbols of action (i.e. ability to understand symbolic meaning in certain cultures, e.g., values and norms) is required. Here, symbols, or in Ricoeur’s words, ‘symbolic mediation’, is a ‘meaning incorporated into action and decipherable from it by other actors in the social interplay’ (ibid., p.57). Finally, *Mimesis 1* concerns a temporal element in that it recognizes in action temporal structures that call for narration. By linking with Augustine’s notion of time, i.e. the *Threefold Present*, Ricoeur argues, ‘What counts here is the way in which everyday praxis orders the present of the future, the present of the past, and the present of the present in terms of one another. For it is this practical articulation that constitutes the most elementary inductor of narrative’ (ibid., p.60).

*Mimesis 2*

*Mimesis 2* is where configuration operates between what proceeds *Mimesis 2* and what follows it. This mimesis has a mediating function between living and understanding, which derives from the dynamic character of the configuring operation. So, the term *emplotment* is preferred here, rather than the term plot. *Mimesis 2* of narrative mediates in different ways towards the construction of the *narrative necessity* that connects different elements into a conceptual unity. In other words, the narrative necessity is emerged from the process that the
structure of one thing after another turns towards the conceptual relation of one thing because of another.

There are at least three mediating functions of emplotment. Firstly, emplotment mediates between the individual events or multiple incidents that are discordant with each other and one story taken as a whole and complete which is in concordance. Through this mediation, an event is not just a singular occurrence; rather, any configurational act gets its meaning from its contribution to the development of the plot. A story is not just a listing of events in serial order; the events are organized into an intelligible whole story. This configuring act is thus a kind of concordance, the principle of order that presides over what Aristotle calls ‘the arrangement of facts’. In short, emplotment draws a configuration out of a simple succession of neutral and separate events (see Ricoeur 1984, p.65).

Secondly, emplotment brings together such factors as heterogeneous as intentions, causes, goals, means, interaction, circumstances, contingencies, accidents, encounters and unexpected results into a synthetic story. Emplotment tries to reach a heterogeneous synthesis and a ‘concordant discordance’ or ‘discordant concordance’ (see Ricoeur 1984, p.65-66; 1991, p.21; 1992, p.141).

Thirdly, emplotment mediates between cosmic time and phenomenological time. Emplotment not only reflects the Augustinian paradox of the time theory, i.e., Threefold Presents as concordant discordance, but also resolves it in a poetic mode. Emplotment reflects the paradox inasmuch as the operation of emplotment combines in variable proportions two temporal dimensions, one of which is chronological and the other not. The chronological dimension of
time constitutes the *episodic* dimension of narrative, which is made up of separate events. The second dimension of time is concerned with the *configurational* dimension of narrative where the plot composes events into a whole story. To use Ricoeur's words,

‘this configurational act consists of “grasping together” the detailed actions or what I have called the story’s incidents. It draws from this manifold of events the unity of one temporal whole’ (Ricoeur 1984, p.66).

The act of emplotment thus extracts a configuration from a succession of events and reveals a certain ‘followability’ of a story, i.e., the story’s capacity to be followed. To understand the story is to understand how and why successive episodes lead to a conclusion, an ‘end point’ which might not be foreseeable, but must be ‘acceptable’, being congruent with the episodes brought together by the story. Thus, such a configurational arrangement transforms the succession of events into one meaningful whole, which is similar to the act of assembling the events together and which makes the story followable. The whole plot can be translated into one ‘thought’, ‘point’ or ‘theme’, which is not atemporal. Rather, the time of the theme is the ‘*narrative time*’ that mediates between the episodic aspect and its configurational aspect. Thus the fact that the story can be followed transforms the temporal paradox of *distention* and *intention* into ‘a living dialectic’ (ibid., p.67). On the one hand, the episodic dimension of the narrative draws narrative time from the direction of the linear representation of time; on the other hand, the configurational dimension of narrative reveals temporal features in a way that is opposite to those of the episodic dimension.

*Mimesis 3*

*Mimesis 3* is the act of ‘refiguring’ following *Mimesis 2*. In his work *Tragedy*, Aristotle says that poetry ‘teaches’ the universal, that tragedy ‘in representing
pity and fear...effects the purgation of these emotions’ (Ricoeur 1984, p.70), and that people can get pleasure from tragedy. Consequently Ricoeur thinks Aristotle signifies that it is in the hearer or the reader that the traversal of mimesis reaches its fulfilment. Based on this, Ricoeur develops his thinking on *Mimesis* 3 which ‘marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader’ (ibid., p.71). According to Ricoeur, *Mimesis* 3 is an intersection of the world configured by plots and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality. Ricoeur writes, ‘The act of reading is thus the operator that joins *mimesis* 3 to *mimesis* 2. It is the final indicator of the refiguring of the world of action under the sign of the plot’ (ibid., p.77). However the act of reading not only entails the entry of any work into the field of communication, but also means the entry into the field of *reference*. By ‘reference’, Ricoeur means that

‘what a reader receives is not just the sense of the work, but, through its sense, its reference, that is, the experience it brings to language and, in the last analysis, the world and the temporality it unfolds in the face of this experience’ (ibid., p.79).

Hence, reference can be seen as a type of ‘application’ of the world of text to the living world. Yet, with respect to narrative’s referential intention and its truth claim, the problem of reference seems to be more complicated. The most intractable problem proceeds from the imbalance between the two referential modes of narrative, i.e., *historical narrative* and *fictional narrative*, the two large classes of narrative discourse. It is generally considered that only history can claim a reference inscribed in empirical reality, inasmuch as historical intentionality aims at events and facts that have actually occurred. It is also widely acknowledged that literature will never equal to history in terms of any ‘realistic’ claim, given that fictional narrative is mainly the product of imagination. However, Ricoeur argues, through *historical traces*, the historical
reference is partly borrowed from the metaphorical reference common to every poetic work, inasmuch as the past can only be reconstructed by the imagination. Conversely, fictional narrative borrows a part of its referential dynamics from historical reference through historical traces. Therefore, Ricoeur claims, ‘it is this reciprocal borrowing that authorizes my posing the problem of the interweaving reference between history and narrative fiction’ (ibid., p.82). It is exactly through the temporality of human action that the reference from historical traces and the metaphorical reference interweave. Thus, time is refigured by history and fiction through this interweaving of their referential mode. For Ricoeur, this is human time.

From the Threefold Mimesis, there emerges a ‘spiral circle’ or ‘healthy circle’, that is, in a mimetic relation of narrative to action: prefiguring is configured into refiguring, and refiguring leads back to prefiguring by way configuration. The first mimetic relation refers to, at the individual level, the semantics of desire which only includes ‘those prenarrative features attached to the demand constitutive of human desire’ (Ricoeur 1988, p.248). Meanwhile the third mimetic relation is ‘defined by the narrative identity of an individual or a people, stemming from the endless rectification of a previous narrative by a subsequent one, and from the chain of refigurations that results from this’ (ibid.). This is exactly the process of identifying an individual or a community itself through the act of reading. The circularity of every analysis of narrative is dynamic and does not cease interpreting in terms of each other the temporal form inherent in experience and the narrative structure. As Ricoeur concludes, ‘Thus the hermeneutic circle of narrative and time never stops being reborn from the circle that the stages of mimesis form’ (Ricoeur 1984, p.76).
3.4.2 Why does the concept of personal identity need to be connected with narrative theory?

Why does the concept of personal identity need to be connected with narrative theory? Firstly, in Ricoeur’s mind, this question has something to do with the temporal dimension of identity. This feature can be seen in Ricoeur’s notion of ‘subjectivity’ and his theory of personal identity as character. According to Ricoeur, ‘subjectivity is neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.32). Rather subjectivity has a dimension of evolution/history gained through the interplay of sedimentation and innovation instructed by social interaction and culture. He argues that a study of the constitution of the self and human action needs to take into account the fact that ‘the person of whom we are speaking and the agent on whom the action depends have a history, are their own history’, and ‘…the changes that affect a subject capable of designating itself in signifying the world’ also need to put into consideration (see Ricoeur 1992, p.113). Assuming that narrative has the function of portraying temporal features of human experience, Ricoeur concludes, ‘This is precisely the sort of identity which narrative composition alone can create through its dynamism’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.32).

Furthermore, narrative not only can create/construct personal identity, but also redeploys it. As Ricoeur’s argument shows, the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation, underlying the acquisition of habit, and the equally rich dialectic of otherness and internalization, underlying the notion of acquired identifications, are there to remind us that personal identity as character has a history which it has contracted. Ricoeur connects this temporal aspect of character to the character in narratives and stories: ‘it is then comprehensible that the stable pole of character can contain a narrative dimension, as we see in
the use of the term “character” identifying it with the protagonist in a story” (Ricoeur 1992, p.122). Ricoeur thus concludes, ‘What sedimentation has contracted, narration can redeploy’ (ibid.).

Secondly, identity of character in the narrative category entails an internal dialectic that can be inscribed in the dialectic of *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity. Ricoeur argues that it is exactly the internal dialectical feature of the concept of character as *narrative identity* that resolves the problematic nature of personal identity. This is because narrative identity can act as a mediator in the dialectic of identity as sameness (*idem*-identity) and identity as selfhood (*ipse*-identity). Ricoeur thinks that the tradition in both Locke and Hume’s notion of personal identity are problematic in that they only treat personal identity as sameness of the person, i.e. one and the same ‘substance’ about a person as an entity over time and in different places. They did not realize that personal identity also includes the mode of *ipse*-identity, and that its relationship with *idem*-identity is a dialectic relationship at temporal dimension. On the one hand, both overlap each other and present the overlapping as *last dispositions*, i.e. character; on the other hand, *ipse*-identity departs *idem*-identity and expressed itself as self-constancy over time. As I have shown earlier in this chapter, Ricoeur stresses it is important not only to distinguish between personal identity as *idem*-identity and as *ipse*-identity, but also to make sense of the dialectic relationship between the two. Rather than taking the stance of either identity as *sameness* or identity as *selfhood*, Ricoeur responds to the problematic nature of identity by engaging with the space between the two poles of personal identity. He contends that identity should be understood as *sense of oneself as ‘self-same’* and that this understanding must take the place of ‘the identity understood in the sense of being the same’ (see Ricoeur 1988, p.246). For Ricoeur, it is exactly in the sphere of temporality that
the mediator like concept of narrative identity is to be sought to oscillate between the pole of character, where idem overlaps ipse, and the pole of pure ipse-identity in selfhood.

To sum up, one goal that Ricoeur tries to achieve through arguing thematically the relation between ipse- and idem-identity at temporal dimension is to respond to the dilemma of personal identity by using his framework of narrative theory. Furthermore Ricoeur tries to show that it is within this framework that the dialectic of selfhood and sameness attains its fullest development. As Ricoeur maintains,

‘Without the recourse to narration, the problem of personal identity would in fact be condemned to an antinomy with no solution. Either we must posit a subject identical with itself through the diversity of its different states, or, following Hume and Nietzsche, we must hold that this identical subject is nothing more than a substantialist illusion, whose elimination merely brings to light a pure manifold of cognitions, emotions, and volitions’ (Ricoeur 1988, p.246).

3.4.3 How is the identity of the character constructed in connection with narrative?

But how is the identity of the character constructed in connection with narrative? How does narrative, the specific model of the interconnection of events, allows us to integrate with permanence in time what seems to be its contrary in the domain of sameness-identity, namely diversity, variability, discontinuity, and instability? It is through Mimesis 2, i.e. ‘emplotment’, that the answers of these questions can be sought.

As I have shown above, emplotment unifies elements that appear to be totally different. Emplotment is what makes a story intelligible. Emplotment, under the aegis of what Ricoeur calls narrative intelligence or narrative understanding
informed by culture, is the ability to take and tie *discordant* events and heterogeneous episodes of human action together into a coherent plot, permitting a *concordant* readability to our lives. The construction of plots is the place where events become episodes and episodes become the ordered contents of stories. The manifold of events are drawn into the unity of one temporal whole and Ricoeur applies the term ‘*configuration*’ to this art of composition, namely, emplotment, which mediates between concordance and discordance. He also defines the term ‘*discordant concordance*’ by using the notion of the *synthesis of the heterogeneous* through plotting, which is characteristic of all narrative composition. As he writes, ‘…the narrative event is defined by its relation to the very operation of configuration; it participates in the unstable structure of discordant concordance characteristic of the plot itself’ (ibid., p.142).

On the level of emplotment, *identity* can be described ‘in dynamic terms by the competition between a demand for concordance and the admission of discordances which, up to the close of the story, threaten this identity’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.141). By ‘*concordance*’, Ricoeur means ‘the principle of order that presides over what Aristotle calls “the arrangement of facts” ’(ibid.). Ricoeur argues, ‘…by entering into the movement of a narrative which relates a character to a plot, the event loses its *impersonal neutrality*’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.142n, emph. added). By ‘*discordances*’, he means ‘the reversals of fortune that make the plot an ordered transformation from an initial situation to a terminal situation’ (ibid., p.141). Identity of character is thus entails an internal dialectic of concordance and discordance.

Ricoeur then explains, ‘Understood in narrative terms, identity can be called, by linguistic convention, the *identity of the character*’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.141).
Character here refers to ‘the one who performs the action in the narrative’ (ibid., 143). He further points out, ‘Then category of character is therefore a narrative category as well, and its role in the narrative involves the same narrative understanding as the plot itself’ (ibid.). Although the narrative category of character should be distinguished from the concept of character as one mode of permanence in time of a person in the living world, they resemble each other in many ways as I have shown section 3.4.2.

3.4.4 How does narrative identity mediate between idem-identity and ipse-identity?

Ricoeur conceptualises the notion of narrative identity as following, ‘[T]he narrative constructs the identity of the character, which can be called his or her narrative identity’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.147-148). The key assumption where Ricoeur relates identity of character (narrative identity) to personal identity has something to do with the notion of narrative of life, the imitation of actions. As Ricoeur puts it,

‘The question is then to determine what the narrative category of character contributes to the discussion of personal identity. The thesis supported here will be that the identity of the character is comprehensible through the transfer to the character of the operation of emplotment, first applied to the action recounted; characters, we will say, are themselves plots’ (ibid., p.143).

From this argument, Ricoeur suggests that narrative identity (identity of the character) is subordinated to life story as narrative, life story as narrative is subordinated to action recounted in narrative, and narrative remains in a mimetic relation with action in reality (see ibid., p.157). As for the relation between the identity of character in the narrative category and the identity of the story itself, Ricoeur argues, ‘The narrative constructs the identity of the
character, what can be called his or her *narrative identity*, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character’ (ibid., p.147-148). In fact, Ricoeur has underscored the primacy of emplotment over character in his work *Time and Narrative* Volume 1 (Ricoeur 1984, p.37) by referring to the theory of plot in Arisotole’s work *Poetics*. He seems to agree with Aristotle that character is subordinate to emplotment. This correlation is articulated by Ricoeur as following,

‘It is indeed in the story recounted, with its qualities of unity, internal structure, and completeness which are conferred by emplotment, that the character preserves throughout the story an identity correlative to that of the story itself’ (Ricoeur 1992, p. 143).

Ricoeur then argues, ‘The genuine nature of narrative identity discloses itself, in my opinion, only in the dialectic of selfhood and sameness’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.140). As I have shown above, there is a dialectic relation *internal* to the character as a narrative category, which is the result of the dialectic of concordance and discordance developed by the emplotment of action.

‘…following the line of concordance, the character draws his or her singularity from the unity of a life considered as a temporal totality which is itself singular and distinguished from all others. Following the line of discordance, this temporal totality is threatened by the disruptive effect of the unforeseeable events that punctuate it (e.g. encounters, accidents, etc.)’ (ibid.,p.147).

Given the concordant-discordant synthesis of the configuration of narrative, ‘the contingency of the event contributes to the necessity, retroactive so to speak, of the history of a life, to which is equated the identity of the character. Thus chance is transmuted into fate’ (ibid.). Identity of the character in a life story can only be understood in this internal dialectic.
When the character in a narrative is confronted with the search for permanence in time attached to the concept of personal identity, the internal dialectic of character needs to be inscribed in the interval between two poles of permanence in time, i.e., between identity as sameness and identity as self-constancy. It is here we can see that narrative identity of character is capable of mediating between these two poles of permanence in time. How? According to Ricoeur, narrative submits the identity of the character to what he calls imaginative variations. These variations include, for example, the kinds of person one imagines oneself to be, the quality of life one imagines to pursue. ‘…narrative does not merely tolerate these variations, it engenders them, seeks them out’ (ibid., p.148). In narrative, the space of variation open to the dialectic relation between sameness and selfhood is vast. At one end of this space, the character in the story has a definite character, a range of the lasting dispositions, which is identifiable and re-identifiable as the same. At the other end, the character in the story ceases to have a definite character, exposing selfhood by taking away the aid of sameness or overwhelmingly imposing selfhood upon lasting dispositions. In the intermediary space of variations between these two modes of identity, where narrative operates, identification of the sameness decreases without disappearing entirely by varying the relation between two meanings of permanence in time through thought experiments reserved in narrative, e.g., literature, movies, life stories of others and so on. This process predominately occurs through reference to or being instructed by certain moral, cultural and ethical dimensions as well as social dimension of human world.

3.5 Narrative identity as a structure of human experience

As has been shown above, Ricoeur proposed that the notion of narrative identity mediates between identity as sameness and identity as selfhood. This
understanding of narrative identity is different from narrative identity as a structure of human experience emerging from the intertwining of historical narrative and fictional narrative, which mediates between ‘real’ life and narrative of life. In the sense of narrative identity as a structure of human experience, narrative can be considered as a condition of temporal existence of a human being. This is a view that accords with Charles Taylor’s stress on the temporal nature of narrative, which I will discuss in detail in the next chapter. For Ricoeur, ‘[narrative] is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience’ (Ricoeur 1984, p.3).

In his works on narrative, Ricoeur tries to articulate and develop the hermeneutic way of understanding human life and the self. As has been shown before, understanding human action through understanding mimesis is one major aim of Ricoeur’s work on narrative. For Ricoeur, narrative is not only mimetic of human action, but also reflects and transforms human life. The latter two functions of narrative particularly lie in Mimesis 3 through refiguration. We understand our lives, our actions, our selves and the world we live in, by interpreting them into narratives, so life understood as narrative constitutes self-understanding. Ricoeur has demonstrated this function of narrative in his work:

‘to give expression to the complex historical present one must have a kind of discourse that can articulate both strings of actions and events and their human context. The kind of discourse to do this is narrative’ (see Ricoeur 1988, p.108-109, emph. added).

3.5.1 Narrative identity as self-interpretation

In fact, Ricoeur’s early discussion on the notion of narrative identity is different from that which I have presented so far. In the conclusion of the 3rd volume of his work Time and Narrative, Ricoeur argues that narrative identity could be
understood as a practical category. In that work, Ricoeur overcomes the dualism between historical narrative and fictional narrative by presenting a dialectic relation between the two. Historical narrative is considered to be about facts recorded and discovered by the historian. Fictional narrative is regarded as something created through the imagination of a person. However, Ricoeur argues that both types of narrative in fact intertwine together. This is why and where ‘narrative identity’ is firstly introduced:

‘The fragile offshoot issuing from the union of history and fiction is the assignment to an individual or a community of a specific identity that we can call their narrative identity’ (Ricoeur 1988, p.246).

For Ricoeur, narrative identity as a structure of human experience both at individual level and collective level would be a sought-after place of the interweaving between history and fiction. As he explained,

‘Here “identity” is taken in the sense of a practical category. To state the identity of an individual or a community is to answer the questions, ‘Who did this?’ “Who is the agent, the author?” We first answer this question by naming someone, that is, by designating them with a proper name. But what is the basis for the permanence of this proper name? What justifies our taking the subject of an action, so designated by his, her, or its proper name, as the same throughout a life that stretches from birth to death? The answer has to be narrative’ (ibid.).

Ricoeur’s view of narrative identity echoes Hannah Arendt’s narrative theory that ‘to answer the question “who?” is to tell the story of life’. Ricoeur writes,

‘The story told tells about the action of the “who.” And the identity of this “who” therefore itself must be a narrative identity’ (ibid.). This is because this ‘action of “who”’, throughout either personal life or community life, from birth to death, can only appear to us through a life story, i.e., the integration of
Ricoeur considers that both the individual and the community are constituted in their identity by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history (see ibid., p.247). At a collective level, for example, Ricoeur argues, through the narrative of biblical Israel in The Bible, the stories taken to be a testimony about the founding events of its history; biblical Israel become the historical community that bears this name. At an individual level, a self understood as the *who of a history (story)*, the one upon whom the story confers a sort of identity, is a self whose temporalisation shapes itself in accordance with a narrative model. To use Ricoeur’s own words, ‘Subjects recognize themselves in the stories they tell about themselves’ (ibid.). In Ricoeur’s view, narrative identity can be regarded as a kind of self-interpretation. As he argues,

‘It therefore seems plausible to take the following chain of assertions as valid: self-understanding is an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation; the latter borrow from history as well as from fiction, making a life story a fictional history or, if one prefers, a historical fiction, interweaving the historiographic style of biographies with the novelistic style of imaginary autobiographies’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.114n).

### 3.5.2 From life to narrative identity

A critical question that might be raised now is: how can we justify the linkage between one’s personal identity sensed in real life, the narrative and the narrative conception of identity? If we accept the narrative conception of identity, it should be realized that there is a crucial space or a passage between living and narrating, or between the action and the character. According to Ricoeur, it is exactly the dynamic Threelfold Mimesis of narrative, i.e.,
Prefiguration, configuration and refiguration, that can nicely fit that space or passage. For Ricoeur, narrative mediates between the world of living and the world of self-understanding.

In Ricoeur’s view, one’s identity cannot be simply given by one’s ego, which under these circumstances is likely to be reduced to a narcissistic, egoistic and stingy ego. Instead, identity must be instructed by cultural symbols. ‘In place of an ego enamoured of itself arises a self instructed by cultural symbols, the first among which are the narratives handed down in our literary tradition’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.33). As he writes,

‘...the self does not know itself immediately, but only indirectly by the detour of the cultural signs of all sorts which are articulated on the symbolic mediations which always already articulate action and among them, the narratives of everyday life. Narrative mediation underlines this remarkable characteristic of self-knowledge—that it is self-interpretation’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.198)

In this sense, our personal identity is not directly found by ourselves, but can be found fruitfully in our life by way of narrative, the recounted life. He further articulates this point as follows,

‘Our life, when then embraced in a single glance, appears to us as the field of a constructive activity, borrowed from narrative understanding, by which we attempt to discover and not simply to impose from outside the narrative identity which constitutes us’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.32).

3.6 Limitations of narrative identity
However, narrative identity is not a seamless identity. It is necessary to reveal some limitations of narrative identity.
3.6.1 An instable and continually reconfigured identity

There might be many narratives about someone’s life and therefore many possible versions of narrative identity. As Ricoeur writes, ‘narrative identity is not a stable and seamless identity. Just as it is possible to compose several plots on the subject of the same incidents (which, thus, should not really be called the same events), so it is always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives’ (Ricoeur 1988, p. 248). Because the dialectic of history and fiction, i.e. the criss-crossing processes of a fictionalization of history and a historization of fiction, and also because of refiguration of narrative, narrative identity continues to make and revise itself. In this sense, one problem of narrative identity is the question of stability in narrative identity.

3.6.2 Exclusion of certain events

Narrative identity tends to presents itself with the coherence, continuity and unity of a character through the configuration of heterogeneous events. But what justifies the selection of the certain events for integration into a complete story seems to be merely the configuring principle, namely, making discordance concordant based on certain themes. In this sense, narrative identity is not a seamless account of life story. There is always the problem that some events, which hardly fit into the story as a whole, might be excluded and neglected. This problem makes getting a complete picture of an individual’s life impossible, thus narrative identity is still a limited presentation and understanding of an individual’s identity.

3.6.3 Ethical limitation in narrative identity

Narrative is not totally without any ethical dimension given the narrator is never an ethically neutral person. Although narrative identity implies ethical dimension, it does not exhaust the question of the self-constancy of a subject.
Villela-Petiti also interprets Ricoeur’s philosophy of selfhood by saying that selfhood (*ipseity*) cannot be reduced to a form of narrative identity because the influence of selfhood exceeds that of narrative identity. Narrative identity calls for an alternative approach, that is, an ethical approach, to analyse ‘non-narrative components’ in the formation of identity of an acting subject. According to Ricoeur, the act of reading triggers an intersection between the world of narrative text and the world of the reader. Further, reading also includes a moment of impetus when reading becomes a provocation to be and to act differently. However, Ricoeur argues,

‘this impetus is transformed into action only through an ethical decision whereby a person says: Here I stand! So narrative identity is not equivalent to true self-constancy except through this decisive moment, which makes ethical responsibility the highest factor in self-constancy’ (Ricoeur 1988, p.249).

Narrative identity narrated by an author, an agent, and initiator of action more or less imposes on ‘the reader a vision of the world that is never ethically neutral, but that rather implicitly or explicitly induces a new evaluation of the world and of the reader as well’ (ibid.), for example, different lifestyles one would want to adopt and the kind of person one wants to be through one’s imagination. So, reading narrative identity places the reader, now an agent, an initiator of action into the ethical field, i.e., readers will face choices from amongst the multiple proposals relevant to ethical justice brought forth by reading. Thus, Ricoeur claims, ‘It is at this point that the notion of narrative identity encounters its limit and has to link up with the non-narrative components in the formation of an acting subject’ (ibid.). Ricoeur seems to suggest that these ‘non-narrative components’ must be seen and discussed through ethical approach in terms of the formation of an acting subject. In this sense, any narrative identity without exhausting its ethical dimension (implied
in self-constancy) will be problematic in having a coherent narrative identity under the call of a ‘good life’. In this sense, narrative identity that lacks any deep analysis of the dimension of ‘others’ might be at risk of leading to an identity of radical individualism, either in the form of an egotistical self or the form of narcissistic egotism.

3.7 Ipse-identity in the dialectic of oneself and others

In this section, I will conduct an in depth analysis on the ipse-identity on the ethical plane, since narrative cannot exhaust the identity as self-constancy. Ricoeur proposes that the connection between self and being of Dasein occurs in Heidegger’s work Being and Time ‘through mediation of the notion of care (Sorge)’ (ibid. p.309). But what is care in Heidegger’s mind? Heidegger writes, ‘Dasein’s facticity is such that its Being-in-the-world has always dispersed itself or even split itself up into definite ways of Being-in…. All these ways of Being-in have concern as their kind of Being’ (Heidegger 1962, p.56). Ricoeur interprets this idea as following, ‘The being of the self presupposes the totality of a world that is the horizon of its thinking, acting, feeling—in short, of its care’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.310). Thus, the connection between Dasein as care and selfhood can be seen. As interpreted by Ricoeur, this link ‘runs from the assertion of Dasein’s character of being in each case mine (§§5, 9), passing through the existential question “who” of Dasein (§25), then by equating the being of Dasein with care (§41), finally leading to the connection between care and selfhood (§64)’ (Ricoeur 1992. p.309-310). In this sense, certain parts of selfhood can be identified according to the self as Being as care.

But what kind of care is it? It seems to me that Heidegger’s notion of ‘self-subsistence’ is not based on ‘care of others’. In order to differentiate the responsibility to others in the notion of self-constancy in Ricoeur’s mind and
the notion of care in Heideggerian sense in the following discussion, I want to clarify here the exact meaning of care borrowed and interpreted by Ricoeur from Heidegger. It must be noted that Heidegger’s notion of care is primarily about self-care. As he claimed on several occasions in Being and Time, ‘Dasein exists for the sake of a potentiality-for-Being itself’ (Heidegger 1962, p.416). Kemp in his paper (1995) finds the message of care of oneself exactly from Heidegger’s analysis of Being-towards-death, which is not only anticipation of itself but ‘anticipation of potentiality-for-Being’. This anticipation ‘turns out to be the possibility of understanding one’s ownmost and uttermost potentiality-for-Being – that is to say, the possibility of proper existence’\(^1\) (ibid., p. 307 cited in and revised by Kemp 1995). Ricoeur himself also admits that the notion of care in a broad sense in Heidegger’s mind is not care of others. He writes, ‘Now care cannot be captured by any psychologising or sociologizing interpretation, nor in general by an immediate phenomenology, as would be the case for the subordinate notions of Besorgen (concern with things) and Fürsorge (solicitude or concern with people) (Ricoeur 1992, p.310). So, I conclude that the notion of care appropriated by Ricoeur from Heidegger should be understood as care of oneself. Ipse-identity in this sense, can be seen as a being that Dasein exerts the constancy, maintenance, subsistence as a kind of self-esteem over oneself, which is underpinned by Dasein as being as care of oneself. Such ipse-identity might change frequently without ethic justice since the self is often instructed by one’s own narrative imagination and a multiple of possibilities in life to become ‘someone’ or to act differently. Such ipse-identity might be at risk of leading to radical individual subject. Thus ethical issues might emerge if we do not look more closely at this mode of ipse-identity on an ethical plane.

\(^1\) The English translation has been revised by Kemp (1995) in his paper.
This is where Ricoeur suggests that others should come in, as can be seen in his discussion of the ipse-identity as self-constancy. So, does not this understanding of identity suggest a kind of care of others? The question that emerges is how can we understand Ricoeur’s seemingly contradictory view of the ipse-identity as being. The answer, in fact, to this question is that there is a dialectic of the selfhood and others.

Ricoeur contends that a person finds its own constitution and identity in selfhood and the self’s question of ‘who’ finds its answer in the sense of being both agent and patient, in both his/her doings and undergoings, in his/her actions and sufferings over lifetime (see Ricoeur 1991, p.191). This suggests that Ricoeur’s notion of ipse-identity is primarily based on and linked with the identity of the self as agent, the initiator of action, and patient, the passive receiver of action. As agent, ipse-self initiates actions towards itself instructed by this self as being of care of oneself. Hence, ipse-identity can be recognized by oneself and others by ascribing actions to an agent. As patient, the ipse-identity can be identified by oneself or others through imputations of actions to a patient. The latter view justifies Ricoeur’s emphasis on ipse-identity as self-constancy that expresses a responsibility to others. As can be seen in the example that Ricoeur has given, one’s act of ‘keeping one’s words one has given to others’ is a kind of self-constancy that has its ethical implication in responsibility to others. This kind of self-constancy is largely stemmed from others’ imputation to the self as patient. As Ricoeur writes,

‘Because someone is counting on me, I am accountable for my actions before another. The term ‘responsibility’ unites both meanings: “counting on” and “being accountable for.” It unites them, adding to them the idea of a response to the question “Where are you?” asked by another who needs me. This response is the
following: “Here I am!” a response that is a statement of self-constancy’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.165).

In this sense, Ricoeur adds a sense of ethical dimension to self-constancy, which emerges from one’s care of others. As Ricoeur writes, ‘self-constancy is for each person that manner of conducting himself or herself so that others can count on that person’ (ibid.).

The ethical dimension of self-constancy and the ethical justification of the promise, as Ricoeur writes, could be derived from the ‘obligation to safeguard the institution of language and to respond to the trust that the other places in my faithfulness [in the promise]’ (ibid., p.124). This ‘obligation’, in my deep analysis, is beyond the field of morality. Obviously, ‘obligation’ here contains a sense of responsibility to others acquired from or imposed by the external world in certain moral cultures, which implies a moral dimension. In deep analysis, this obligation could originate from the care of others as feelings of internal sympathy towards others (e.g., others’ sufferings) that emerge from intersubjective relations, which is in fact an ethical dimension². That is to say, on the one hand, being a person as the result of self’s internalisation of certain cultural norms means that one should keep faith to some shared norms or moral rules as a moral being in his/her world. In the third volume of his work Time and Narrative, Ricoeur has asserted that ‘...self-constancy refers to a self instructed by the works of a culture that it has applied to itself’ (Ricoeur 1988,

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² In fact, Ricouer particularly distinguishes the notion of ethics and morality in his work. He defines term ‘ethics’ for personal conduct as aim of an accomplished life and define the term ‘morality’ as the articulation of this aim in norms (Ricoeur 1992, p.170). He further defines ‘ethical intention’ as ‘aim at the “good life” with and for others, in just institutions’ (ibid., p.172). He also maintains that morality is subordinate to ethics, and both complementary to each other (see ibid., p.170-171).
p.247). On the other hand, as a person, a certain kind of feelings of sympathy could emerge from inside of the self in its mutual understanding of the conditions of others implied in the intersubjective relationship. For example, ‘I’ can feel how others will suffer if ‘I’ do not respond the trust that others place in my act of keeping my words given to them. In this sense of similitude between oneself and others, Ricoeur concludes, ‘the esteem of the others as a oneself and the esteem of oneself as an other’ become equivalent (see Ricoeur 1992, p.194), in the intersubjective relationship. Otherwise, the relationship will not be in balance and equity.

Now, what we can see on the ethical plane is an ipse-identity as being one which oscillates in the dialectics of narrative identity and ethical identity, of care of oneself and care of others, or we can see an ipse-identity exists in the balanced care of both self and others (see Diagram 1.). On the one hand, the question of ‘Who am I?’ without the aid of sameness can be incorporated into the declaration ‘Here is where I stand!’ From being a person who is captured by narrative imagination or many possibilities to choose for himself or herself, appears an unstable identity that others can hardly count on. As Ricoeur analyses this mode of identity, “‘Who am I, so inconstant, that notwithstanding you count on me?’” (Ricoeur 1992, p.168). On the other hand,

‘there is no doubt that the “Here I am!” by which the person recognizes himself or herself as the subject or imputation marks a halt in the wandering that may well result from the self’s confrontation with a multitude of models for action and life, some of which go so far as paralyze the capacity for firm action’ (ibid., p.167).

Here, others are always in one’s vision, and perhaps have primacy over oneself, when considering the question of ‘Who I am’. To quote Ricoeur,
‘Between the imagination that says, “I can try anything” and the voice that says “Everything is possible but not everything is beneficial (understanding here, to others and to yourself),” a muted discord is sounded. It is this discord that the act of promising transforms into fragile concordance: “I can try anything”, to be sure, but “Here is where I stand!”’ (ibid., p.167-168).

3.8 The overarching dialectic: between sameness and others

From the interpretation and reconstruction of Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity I have given by now, we can perceive an overarching dialectic relationship, a dialectic of sameness (of a person) and others in which selfhood is mediated between both (see Diagram 1.). It is not difficult to see this dialectic spans the first two dialectics, that is, the dialectic of the sameness and selfhood and the dialectic of selfhood and others. Sameness and others are different. Ricoeur argues,

‘As long as one remains within the circle of sameness-identity, the otherness of the other than self offers nothing original… “others” appears in the list of antonyms of “same” alongside “contrary,” “distinct,” “diverse,” and so on’ (ibid., p.3).

The first dialectic, that is, the dialect between idem-identity and ipse-identity is complementary to the dialectic of sameness and others, because selfhood can act as a mediator between sameness and others. On the one hand, to maintain the sameness of oneself, one might not heed the call from others; on the other hand, for the purpose of care of others, one might change his/her sameness, for example, changing one’s habit, for the sake of others. One’s final decision on changing or not depends on the proportion of one’s preference for the care of oneself as sameness and one’s preference for care of others in this dialectic scale.
3.9 Conclusion: Reflexivity and the role of learning in Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity

In this chapter, I have presented an interpretation and a reconstruction of Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity. What characterises his theory are three pairs of dialectic relationships implied in the notion of personal identity, i.e., the dialectics between sameness and selfhood, between selfhood and others and between sameness and others. It could be argued that what emerges from these dialectic dimensions of personal identity are three modes of reflexivity in which the roles of learning relevant to personal identity can be perceived and developed.

First, as can be seen from above, Ricoeur suggests that two modes of permanence in time in selfhood are basically two different modes of personal identity. These may be seen in terms of two different beings of the self expressed in their dialectic relationship, i.e. identity as character and identity as self-constancy. **Idem**-identity in the field of selfhood is identity as sameness of the self, under the category of the being as substance, as ‘something’. **Ipse**-identity is the identification of the permanence of self’s *ipseity*, that is, the identification of self’s selfhood as one of the existentials as care, which belong to the mode of being of *Dasein* (e.g. the continuity, maintenance or subsistence of the *ipseity*). Between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity, there exists a dialectic relationship. On the one hand, identity of character is where *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity overlap and accord with each other. On the other hand it is precisely in the act of keeping one’s promise that *ipse*-identity departs from *idem*-identity and stands alone opposite to identity as sameness. It is exactly in this dialectic relationship between sameness and selfhood that a kind of reflexivity of the self stands out. On the one hand, one goes back into his/her memory to seek sameness with himself/herself to gain a sense of consistency
within oneself from the past to the present. On the other hand, based on one’s reading of the past and imagination of the future ‘to be someone’, he/she exerts action over himself or herself in order to change and to be different from the ‘old’ self. This mode of reflexivity is thus mediating between one’s memory and his/her imagination, between being the same and being different. Thanks to the notion of narrative identity, this mode of reflexivity can be conducted by way of narrative, since it is narrative identity with its corresponding internal dialectic that serves as mediator to oscillate between sameness and selfhood.

Secondly, we can see in *ipse*-identity as self-constancy, there is no aid of sameness, and *ipse* stands ‘alone’ by itself. This is not difficult to understand since, as I have shown, *ipse* is a mode of being of *Dasein* as care of oneself. However, under closer examination we can see that self-constancy does not stand ‘alone’. Self-constancy, it can be argued, can be constituted by ‘others’, since ‘obligation’ expressed in self-constancy involves both moral and ethical dimensions. Hence what appears here is another dialectic relationship, which exists between selfhood and others. On the one hand, the notion of self-constancy is where the *ipse* goes hand in hand with others. On the other hand, when *ipse* neglects others, it might present itself as a troubled being, understood in egotism, narcissism and/or radical individualism. Here we can see the second mode of reflexivity, which mediates between the dialectic of the selfhood and others. However, this reflexivity no longer functions on the narrative scale, but puts itself on an ethical plane overarching both moral responsibility and sympathy towards others.

Finally, a third dialectic relationship can be perceived between *sameness* and *others* in which selfhood is mediated between both. For the sake of others, for the sake of ethical purposes, the sameness of oneself can be changed by the
action initiated by this very self, since this self involves others as an element which is constitutive of itself, since this self is a oneself as another. The reflexivity of the self is therefore also conducted in the dialectic relationship between sameness and others, which can be partly facilitated by investigating one’s narrative identity, since this third dialectic crowns the dialectic between sameness and selfhood.

It is worth noting that the implications of the roles of learning concerning one’s identity are rich in reflexivity existed in these dialectical frameworks. Through one’s reflexive construction of one’s personal life in life stories/narrative, one can learn a great deal about his/her personal identity in the first dialectic. Here one can learn not only the stability and the continuity of his/her identity as sameness through reading one’s narrative identity. One can also learn who one wants to be, by imagining becoming ‘someone’ he/she preferred to be, an ‘imagined character’ inferred from his/her life story. One’s interpretation of one’s narrative identity is also a learning process for gaining the meaning of his life, e.g., learning something good or bad, happy or sad, conveyed in the narrative’s plot instructed by certain cultural mores. The role of learning contained in the second mode of reflexivity lies in one’s response to others, which is a kind of learning about both responsibility towards and sympathy for others. In the third mode of reflexivity, one can see that sameness of a person can be partly changed into different identity for the sake of caring for others, which implies a kind of learning in an ethical category. However, learning concerning one’s identity in this sense is also in a tension between learning for the sameness and learning for the ethical dimension of personal identity.
Chapter 4 Charles Taylor’s view on identity and narrative

In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become and of where we are going.

(Charles Taylor 1989, p.47)

My self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative.

(Charles Taylor 1989, p.50)

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to investigate the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor’s theory of identity, particularly focusing on the question of the need of personal identity for us. I will start with a section that concerns itself with the issue of whether or not personal identity matters by reconstructing a discussion of the issue based on ideas of Parfit, Ricoeur and Taylor. Then I will focus on Taylor’s theory of identity by first clarifying his view of the self. This part is followed by a section on Taylor’s definition of identity. Then I will provide a systematic interpretation of Taylor’s views that identity is underpinned by what he calls ‘strong evaluation’. Next, I will discuss Taylor’s main thesis that identity is connected with ‘the good’. After that, an interpretation of the relationship between Taylor’s moral theory and his notion of ‘the good’ will be given. Then, I will discuss how Taylor’s notion of moral identity is related to narrative. I will conclude with a discussion about the roles of leaning in Taylor’s theory of identity.
4. 2 Does personal identity matter?

Does personal identity matter? This issue has been argued about by some philosophers in the last two decades. In his work, *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit argues that ‘personal identity is not what matters’ (Parfit 1986, p.255 cited in Ricoeur 1992, p.130). As I have showed in the previous chapter, Parfit argues that ‘puzzling cases’ of personal identity cannot be decided and the question as such is therefore empty. Parfit then argues that personal identity is not what matters. He bases this view on his understanding of personal identity as sameness. Ricoeur presents the line of Parfit’s argument clearly:

‘…if indecidability seems unacceptable to us, it is because it troubles us. This is clear in all the bizarre cases in which survival is at issue: What is going to happen to me? I ask. Now if we are troubled, it is because the judgment of identity seems important to us. If we give up this judgment of importance to us, we cease to be troubled. Presented with the options opened by the puzzling cases, we are ready to concede that we know all there is to know about the case in question and to stop the investigation there’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.136, emph. added).

The idea that personal identity does not matter can also be identified in Parfit’s definition of personal identity. He asserts that ‘[a] person’s existence just consists in the existence of a brain and body, and occurrence of a series of interrelated physical and mental events’ (Parfit 1986 cited in Ricoeur 1992, p 131). In relation to simple mental or psychological continuity, the person constitutes a ‘separate further fact’. This ‘separate further fact’ is in the sense that the person is distinct from his/her brain and his/her experiences. So, for Parfit, ‘personal identity consists in an additional fact in relation to physical and/or mental continuity’ (see ibid.). Ricoeur states that all these terms are described in an *impersonal* manner, rather than described in relation to *mineness*. Further, the impersonal feature of Parfit’s version of personal identity, is
derived from the *causal* link between certain events and facts at physical and mental levels. As Parfit himself writes, ‘identity over time just involves…psychological connectedness and/or psychological continuity, with the right kind of cause’ (Parfit 1986, p.216 cited in Taylor 1989, p.50).

Parfit approaches personal identity from a ‘reductionist thesis’ and a ‘Further Fact View’ (Parfit 1986, p.210 cited in Ricoeur 1992, p.131), that is, he sees personal identity as an impersonal, separate, further fact in relation to the series of mental and physical events in question. However, these views seem to simply assume personal identity as *sameness* vis-à-vis *self-consciousness*, and exclude the dimension of *self-concern* to personal identity, that is, our concern for ourselves, including our concerns for our life as a whole, our life mode and who we are in human context. Given that personal identity is seen as ‘an additional fact’ in relation to *causal* connectedness and continuity of psychological/physical events and facts, and given that personal identity as a result of *self-understanding* and personal (re-)construction involving *self-concern* in relation to one’s life seems to be neglected, it is no surprise that Parfit agrees on the view that ‘a human life is not an *a priori* unity or that personal identity does not have to be defined in terms of whole life’ (see Taylor 1989, p. 49). Hence, it is no surprise that Parfit concludes that personal identity does not matter to us.

Ricoeur does not agree with Parfit’s view. For Ricoeur, Parfit’s conclusion not only draws simply from a view of personal identity as sameness, but also is a result of his unawareness of selfhood as *mineness* ‘in each case’. As Ricoeur argues,

‘how can we ask ourselves about *what* matters if we could not ask to *whom* the thing mattered or not? Does not the questioning about
what matters or not depend upon self-concern, which indeed seems to be constitutive of selfhood?’ (ibid., p.137).

He further argues that ‘it is “our view” of life that is at issue’ (ibid., p.138). Although Ricoeur does contend that personal identity matters, he does not provide us with a detailed and systematic argument on this issue. It is Charles Taylor who asks us why personal identity matters to us by establishing personal identity as self-consciousness and personal identity as self-concern.

Taylor argues, ‘personal identity is the identity of the self, and the self is understood as an object to be known’ (Taylor 1989, p.49). But this object is unlike other objects. But Taylor argues, ‘For Locke it (i.e. self) has this peculiarity that it essentially appears to itself. Its being is inseparable from self-awareness. Personal identity is then a matter of self-consciousness… Self-perception is the crucial defining characteristic of the person for Locke’ (ibid.). Taylor argues that ‘all that remains of the insight that the self is crucially an object of significance to itself is this requirement of self-consciousness’ (ibid.). Taylor points out that Parfit’s argument on personal identity is basically his further work on John Locke’s work of personal identity and Parfit draws on Locke’s understanding of the self as self-awareness (ibid.). The full focus on self-consciousness, more precisely on one’s consciousness of ‘sameness’ of ‘self as an object’, can partly explain why the terms described in Parfit’s notion of personal identity is impersonal, since the language used to describe ‘sameness’ can only be neutral by nature.

Taylor thus does not agree to fully adopt Locke’s notion of the self. ‘[W]hat has been left out is precisely the mattering. The self is defined in neutral terms, outside of any essential [moral] framework of questions’ (ibid.). According to Taylor,
‘Locke recognizes that we are not indifferent to ourselves; but he has no inkling of the self as a *being* which essentially is constituted by a certain mode of *self-concern* – in contrast to the concern we cannot but have about the quality of our experiences as pleasurable or painful’ (ibid., emph. added).

Taylor thus concludes that modern understanding of personal identity has for a long time produced an ‘erroneous understanding of the self’ (see ibid). For Taylor, a human self exists in a space of moral issues. Personal identity does matter to us because it is closely connected with the self as self-concern. As Taylor writes,

‘We talk about a human being as a “self”. The word is used in all sorts of ways...But there is a sense of the term where we speak of people as selves, meaning that they are *beings* of the requisite depth and complexity to have an identity... (or to be struggling to find one)’ (ibid., p.32, emph. added).

This understanding of the self is different from self that is regarded as a neutral object in terms of self-consciousness. Rather, Taylor’s understanding of the self is the self in the sense of *self-concern* in relation to moral questions. Personal identity matters exactly because the term self has a sense of the self-concern about its being in the world. However, as I will show Taylor’s self-concern is not an egotistic self-concern, but is fundamentally the self-concern constitutive of otherness and moralities.

In order to have a better understanding of Taylor’s view of personal identity and why it matters to us, we need first of all understand his view of the self, since, to him, the latter is closely related to the former.
4. 3 Taylor’s view on the self

4. 3.1 Self in ‘moral space’

Taylor’s approach to the ‘self’ features the relation of the ‘self’ to ‘the good’. In his words, self exists in ‘moral space’. His conception of the self is conspicuously stressed on the ‘value’ or ‘moral’. He criticizes that the self in the language of mainstream social sciences is ‘value-free’, which is mainly about the general fact on human care for the ‘ego’ and ‘self-image’. He does not think that those aspects of self are essential to human personhood. Instead, he proposes the personal identity matters because it has something to do with a ‘human agency’ in his view. He writes,

‘the notion of self which connects it to our need for identity is meant to pick out this crucial feature of human agency, that we cannot do without some orientation to the good, that we each essentially are (i.e. define ourselves at least inter alia by) where we stand on this’ (Taylor 1989, p.33).

Taylor further claims, ‘[W]e are selves only in that certain issues matter for us’ (ibid., p.34). This dimension of the self suggests a certain mode of self-concern, a kind of caring about our ‘selves’ with respect to certain moral issues. Taylor develops his argument by using a spatial metaphor: the self exists in moral space (see ibid., p.28). This moral space is a space inhabited by questions concerning moral issues. Taylor’s view that self exists in ‘moral space’ has two senses. Firstly, he argues,

‘To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary’ (ibid.)
Those questions are about moral issues, e.g., what kind of life modes I would like to adopt, what kind of person I want to be, etc. As Taylor says, ‘What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me’ (ibid., p.34). If things, which mainly refer to desires or purposes in Taylor’s mind, have no significance and meaning for me, I might just live a ‘mere life’ or just a ‘biological’ life, or might suffer the meaninglessness of life. In Taylor’s words, such a personal condition is ‘disorientation’ vis-à-vis the good, which is quite similar to the pathological dislocation of the person in an identity crisis (see ibid., p.28; cf. p.31). In this sense, self is in fact orientated by certain ‘good’ in ‘moral space’.

Secondly, Taylor claims, ‘…we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good’ (ibid. p.34, emph. added). That is to say, in this moral space, we can always be asked or ask ourselves, where we stand in relation to the good we strongly value within ‘moral space’. Those questions are concerned with our direction, i.e. moving near or far, towards or away vis-à-vis the good we strongly value. In this second sense, self moves in a ‘space of questions’ or in ‘moral space’ in relation to the good.

For Taylor, such a ‘moral’ self involves strong evaluations, a key notion in Taylor’s moral theory, which I will discuss in section 4.5 of this chapter. That is, if ‘I’ have no strong evaluations to the different things in relation to different goods or within a certain good, ‘I’ might be at a loss to say what is worth mattering, and thus cannot judge what is important for ‘me’ and what is not.
4.3.2 Self in the web of interlocution

Another crucial feature of self in Taylor’s mind is that ‘one is a self only among other selves’ (ibid., p.35). Taylor calls this as ‘self among interlocutors’ (ibid., p.29) or ‘dialogical’ self (see Taylor 1995b, p.230). He explains this feature of the self by examining the relationship between self and language. He writes, ‘to study person is to study beings who only exist in, or are partly constituted by, a certain language’ (Taylor 1989, p.34-35). ‘There is no way we could be inducted into personhood except by being initiated into language’ (ibid., p.35). ‘A language only exists and is maintained within a language community. And this indicates another crucial feature of a self. One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it’ (ibid.). So, for Taylor, a self exists within ‘webs of interlocution’ (see ibid., p.36). As he articulates,

‘I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors who were essential to my achieving my self-definition, and in relation to certain interlocutors who are now critical to my continuing grasp of language of self-understanding, and both relation can overlap’ (ibid., p.36).

Self-interpretation hence is acquired through others and requires language. As Taylor writes, ‘...things have significance for me, and the issue of my identity is worked out, only through a language of interpretation’ (ibid., p.34).

Taylor further contends that the language used by an individual is not something invented by him/herself. An individual acquires language only in ‘a language community’ (Taylor 1989, p.35) and through interaction with others who matter to us—what Mead called ‘significant others’ (see Taylor 1995b, p.230). Also, according to Taylor, interlocutors are not necessarily face-to-face partners with an individual, they could be absent, or understood.
as imaginary persons. This indirect way of relating oneself to ‘significant others’ is what Taylor calls a ‘transcendental condition’ (Taylor 1989, p. 38). In this sense, interlocutors might be absent; they can be the dead, or have not yet been born. For example, our conversation with our parents continues within ourselves as long as we live; reading a philosopher, a novelist and poet can also be seen as a dialogue with others.

It seems to Taylor that ‘moral space’ and ‘web of interlocution’ overlap. He holds that a fundamental moral orientation is essential to being a human interlocutor, one who is capable of answering for oneself the question of ‘who’ in the web of interlocution (see ibid. p.29). As he writes, ‘…a person without a framework altogether would be outside our space of interlocution; he wouldn’t have a stand in the space where the rest of us are’ (ibid., p.31). He writes, ‘Normally, however, one dimension would not be exclusive of the other’ (ibid., p.36). In this sense, a ‘self’ exists in both domains at once.

### 4.3.3 Self is partly constituted by its self-interpretation

For Taylor, self is not like an ‘object’ in the usually understood sense in the mainstream social sciences (e.g. psychology and sociology). Self for Taylor is not ‘neutral’ and there is always a certain element of ‘self-concern’. As he writes,

> ‘we are not selves in the way that we are organisms, or we don’t have selves in the way we have hearts and livers. We are living beings with these organs quite independently of our self-understandings or -interpretations, or the meanings things have for us’ (Taylor 1989, p. 34).

In his early writing, Taylor claims that some of the human emotions involve import-ascription which is subject-referring, and those subject-referring
feelings are the basis of our understanding about what it is to be human (see Taylor 1985a). As he argues,

‘…the human subject is such that the question arises inescapably, which kind of being he is going to realize. He is not just de facto a certain kind of being, with certain given desires, but it is somehow ‘up to’ him what kind of being he is going to be’ (Taylor 1976, 281).

Therefore, Taylor claims that self is partly constituted by its self-interpretation (see Taylor 1985a, 1989, p.34). He claims,

‘…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’ (1985a, p.47).

Although how a person views or interprets him/herself is not all there is to know about him/her, self-interpretation is a vital component of an identity, one that cannot be neglected. In other words, in order to understand and explain ourselves and our identities, we must accommodate those self-interpretations. Taylor then concludes that ‘human beings are self-interpreting animals’ (1985a, p.45) and self is partly constituted by its self-interpretation. However, self-interpretation is not purely created by a subject. I have shown above, self-interpretation requires language and the language is always a community language rather than a self-invented language. In this sense, self-interpretation is not forged in isolation, but achieved in relation with ‘others’ and a community.

One important feature of Taylor’s notion of self-interpretation is that ‘our self-interpretations are partly constitutive of our experiences’ (1985a, p.37). Taylor claims that ‘our formulation about ourselves can alter what they are
about’ (1985a, p.101; cf. 35-8, 191; 1985b: 26-7). Changes in vocabularies of self-understanding of experiences, emotions and motivations, change the self that is thereby understood, and subsequently leads to changes in our experiences. As he writes,

‘Our attempts to formulate what we hold important must, like descriptions, strive to be faithful to something. But what they strive to be faithful to is not an independent object..., but rather a largely inarticulate sense of what is of decisive importance. An articulation of this “object” tends to make it something different from what it was before” ’ (Taylor 1985a, p.38).

Taylor coins the term ‘expressivism’ to mean that ‘the development of new modes of expression enables us to have new feeling, more powerful or more refined, and certainly more self-aware. In being able to express our feelings, we give them a reflective dimension which transforms them’ (1985a, p.233; cf. 1995b, p.92, 97-98 quoted by Abbey 2000, p.61).

Any change of expression about oneself has causal influences in two directions: ‘it can sometimes allow us to alter experience by coming to fresh insight; but more fundamentally it circumscribes insight through the deeply embedded shape of experience for us’ (1985a, p.37). According to Taylor new self-interpretation as a result of expressivism is not arbitrary. Rather, it can be seen as a progressive articulation of narrative about the unfolding and improving of self-knowledge. Because, according to Taylor, in our articulation about ourselves, ‘there are more or less adequate, more or less truthful, more self-clairvoyant, or self-deluding interpretations’ (Taylor 1985, p.38), so the notion of ‘expressivism’ can be seen as an approach to have an ongoing, progressive and improved self-reflective understanding of one’s life.
Another feature of Taylor’s view of self-interpretation is that the self can only make best sense of him/herself through critical reflection. As he claims,

‘What better measure of reality do we have in human affairs than those terms which on critical reflection and after correction of the errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives? “Making the best sense” here includes not only offering the best, most realistic orientation about the good but also allowing us best to understand and make sense of the actions and feelings of ourselves and others (Taylor 1989, p.57; cf.1995b, p.39).

Our self-interpretation in this sense is always in quest for the best sense of our lives, and is open to revision based on critical reflection.

4.4 Taylor’s definition of identity

As I have shown above, there are mainly two features of self in Taylor’s self theory, i.e. the self in moral space and the self in the ‘web of interlocutions’. In the following section, I will show how Taylor’s definition of identity is related to his two views on the self.

4.4.1 Identity as moral being

Taylor defines his notion of identity in the sense of ‘finding one’s identity’ (see Taylor 1985, p.34; 1989, p.32). He clearly defines identity by linking it to the notion of moral framework, or ‘horizon’ provided by strong evaluations in moral space (see Taylor 1989). It is not difficult to see that this approach to identity comes from his view of the self in the sense of ‘self in moral space’. For Taylor, the question of identity, i.e. ‘who am I?’, cannot be necessarily answered by name and genealogy. Rather, it can be expressed in a mode of self-concern in relation to certain moral issues. He writes,
'What does answer this question for us is an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us. To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon ‘within which I am capable of taking a stand’ (Taylor 1989, p.27).

According to Taylor, commitment here is moral and/or spiritual in meaning, e.g. being as a Catholic, or an anarchist; identification is defined by certain community mores in terms of nationality, tradition, culture, e.g., being a Chinese or an English man/woman. Identity as such is ‘the background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense’ (Taylor 1995b, p.231).

Thus, certain moral or spiritual commitments and certain national or traditional identifications are of great importance in the formation of the moral horizon or framework, and hence to the notion of identity. As he writes,

‘…to be able to answer for oneself is to know where one stands, what one wants to answer. And that is why we naturally tend to talk of our fundamental orientation in terms of who we are. To lose this orientation, or not to have found it, is not know who one is. And this orientation, once attained, defines where you answer from, hence your identity’ (Taylor 1989, p.29).

Taylor further claims, ‘…were they to lose this commitment or identification, they would be at sea, as it were; they wouldn’t know anymore, for an important range of questions, what the significance of things was for them’ (Taylor 1989, p.27). Without those commitments and identification, there might be no horizon/framework, and therefore, I will have no idea or lose any sense of where I stand. Taylor holds that it is a form of ‘disorientation’ (see ibid.)
which can be seen as a radical uncertainty about where I stand. Such a situation amounts to what we normally call an ‘identity crisis’ which is a term to express a state of not knowing ‘who I am’.

4.4.2 ‘Others’ in moral identity

However according to Taylor, identity is complex and many-tiered; identity defined by commitments and identification is just its *historical* facet. As has been shown, only within the horizon/framework partly provided by moral/spiritual commitments and certain national/traditional identifications, I can identify where I stand on questions of what is good, or worthwhile, admirable or of value and thus recognize an identity. In Taylor’s view, identity is not only about recognizing certain norms or something ‘given’ in the self through identification-with, it is also about the self-interpretation derived from *dialogical* dimension of the self, or *intersubjective* dimension of the self.

As I have demonstrated above, Taylor asserts, ‘one is a self only among other selves’ and self exists within ‘webs of interlocution’. Consequently Taylor argues, ‘To be someone who qualifies as a potential object of this question (i.e. question of who) is to be such an interlocutor among others, someone with one’s own standpoint or one’s own role, who can speak for him/herself’ (ibid., 29).

‘My self-definition is understood as an answer to the question Who I am. And this question finds its original sense in the interchange of speakers. I define who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate *relations* to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining *relations* are lived out (ibid., p.35, emph. added).
What Taylor suggests here is that moral orientation not only comes from certain moral norms, but also results from our interaction with others, particularly, ‘significant others’ with whom we always have conversations in certain moral languages. Taylor argues, ‘If some of the things I value most are accessible to me only in relation to the person I love, then she becomes part of my identity’ (Taylor 1995b, p.231). Thus, ‘My discovering my own identity doesn’t mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others’ (ibid.; cf. Taylor 1985a, p.209; 1989, p.36). This is what Taylor calls ‘inwardly generated identity’ through one’s relationship with others (see Taylor 1995b, p.231).

The influence of ‘significant others’ on a person has a *lifelong* effect on his/her personal identity. To quote Taylor as following,

‘We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us. Even after we outgrow some of these others – our parents, for instance – and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live’ (Taylor 1995b, p.230).

From this argument, Taylor concludes that the influences of significant others continues over our lives even though they might be just internalized in our early years. Our identity is therefore continually shaped by our conversation with *others*.

Taking the above into account, it is not difficult to see that Taylor’s full definition of someone’s identity thus usually involves not only one’s stand on moral and spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community and others. This is because in most conditions, one’s ‘moral concerns’ in a community can only be interpreted in a language carried by ‘significant others’,
a community and certain norms.

4.5 Taylor’s theory of ‘strong evaluation’

As I have already mentioned in section of 4.4.1, identity is defined by strong evaluations. But how should we understand the notion of strong evaluation? I will try to interpret this notion in the following section.

In his essay ‘What is Human Agency?’ (1985[1977]), Taylor proposes an ontological thesis in which he tries to identify something essential to human agency, something without which an agent would not be recognizably human. He introduced the difference between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ evaluation and argues that human beings are ‘strong evaluators’. This is partly because the strong evaluator possesses a ‘self’ or a ‘human agent’ constitutive of strong evaluations that can assess quality of the life one lives or wants to live and kind of being one wants to be. Thus, for Taylor, the identification of the ‘self’, or our identity is defined by certain fundamental evaluations that are inseparable from ourselves as human agents as strong evaluators. Taylor therefore maintains that identity partly consists of strong evaluations, or of ‘moral concerns’, or we may say, of certain ‘orientation’ to one’s strongly valued ‘good’ that discussed in his later work Sources of the Self (1989).

4.5.1 What is strong evaluation?

In his essay ‘What is human agency?’, the notion of ‘strong evaluation’ is put forward by Taylor as a result of his exploration of what is it ‘that we attribute to ourselves as human agents which we would not attribute to animals’ (Taylor 1985a, p.15). This notion is developed from Harry Frankfurt’s thesis on the distinction between first- and second-order desires. First-order desires are desires that human beings share with other animals; the second-order desires
are the powers or attitudes to evaluate our desires. Frankfurt thus claims that ‘no animal other than man... appears to have the capacity for reflective self-evaluation that is manifested in the formation of second-order desires’ (Frankfurt 1971, p.7 cited in Taylor 1985, p.16). While Taylor agrees with Frankfurt, he conducts a further examination of the ‘capacity for reflective self-evaluation’ classified in a second-order desire by differentiating between ‘weak evaluation’ and ‘strong evaluation’.

‘Weak evaluation’ is concerned with ‘weighing two desired actions to determine the more convenient, or how to make different desires compatible (for instance, he might resolve to put off eating although he is hungry, because later he could both eat and swim), or determining how to get the most overall satisfaction (see Taylor 1985a, p.16). In weak evaluation, our evaluations are based on our contingent ‘feelings’ and caring about immediate outcomes. Taylor argues that a subject who only evaluates weakly is a simple weigher of alternatives.

‘Strong evaluation’, first of all, however, is concerned with the quality of our motivations, or more precisely, the qualitative worth of different desires (ibid.). In strong evaluation,

‘our desires are classified in such categories as higher or lower, virtuous or vicious, more or less fulfilling, more or less refined, profound or superficial, noble or base; where they are judged as belonging to different modes of life, fragmented or integrated, alienated or free, saintly, or merely human, courageous or pusillanimous and so on’(ibid.).

Taylor writes in his later work, ‘A good test for whether an evaluation is “strong” in my sense is whether it can be the basis for attitudes of admiration
and contempt’ (Taylor 1989a, p.523).

A subject who engages in strong evaluation is a strong evaluator. This is not to say that some people are strong evaluators, some are not. Rather, for Taylor, engaging in strong evaluation is a human universal. He writes, ‘I think this is something like a human universal, present in all but what we would clearly judge as very damaged human beings’ (Taylor 1994, p.249; cf. 1985a, p.16, 28, 33). Arto Laitinen interprets this concept thus: ‘the crucial idea is that human relations to the world, to self and to others are value-laden, and thus intrinsically strongly evaluative (Laitinen 2003, p.19, 30). Arto further interprets,

‘Engagement in strong evaluation is not merely one optional activity among others, not merely a matter of taking a break and stepping back and reflecting. It is rather a mode of understanding, which, to follow Heidegger, is an aspect of one’s being-in-the-world which is always already in operation, something one cannot really turn off’ (ibid., p.30).

In Taylor’s moral theory, human moral intuition or moral reactions all involve strong evaluation. This is why Ruth Abbey (2000) interprets strong evaluation as a human’s intuitive judgement or response. In a word, Taylor claims that human beings are strong evaluators.

4.5.2. ‘Depth’ of strong evaluation

One important feature of strong evaluation is that it has ‘depth’ which weak evaluation lacks. There are at least two different senses of ‘depths’ that the notion ‘strong evaluation’ contains. Firstly, the strong evaluator evaluates his/her alternatives by a qualitative characterization of desires as higher and lower, noble and base, and so on through a language of evaluative distinction.
This is because a strong evaluator has ‘a vocabulary of worth’. As Taylor writes,

‘Strong evaluation deploys a language of evaluative distinctions, in which different desires are described as noble or base, integrating or fragmenting, courageous or cowardly, clairvoyant or blind and so on’ (Taylor 1985a, p.19)

The ‘language of evaluative distinction’ enables a strong evaluator to articulate his/her alternatives.

‘The strong evaluator can articulate superiority just because he has a language of contrastive characterization. So within an experience of reflective choice between incommensurables, strong evaluation is a condition of articulacy, and to acquire a strongly evaluative language is to become (more) articulate about one’s preferences’ (1976a, p.288 cited in Abbey 2000, p.20)

Nicholas Smith further interprets this point thus: ‘the language of qualitative contrasts’ enables strong evaluator to ‘reach a more nuanced and refined understanding of the options available to him’ (Smith 2000, p.90). From this, one can realise that ‘the language of evaluative distinction’ takes a key role in giving a ‘deep’ articulation about the strong evaluator’s preferences.

Secondly, ‘depth’ contained in the notion of ‘strong evaluation’ concerns ‘the quality of life’. Taylor writes,

‘A strong evaluator, by which we mean a subject who strongly evaluates desires, goes deeper, because he characterizes his motivation at greater depth. To characterize one desire or inclination as worthier, or noble, or more integrated, etc. than others is to speak it in terms of the kind of quality of life which it expresses and sustains’ (Taylor 1985a, p.25).
In addition to this, Taylor suggests strong evaluation is related to the quality of life and the kind of being, hence identity. He analyses how these notions are related one another:

‘...strong evaluator reflection also examines the different possible modes of being of the agent. Motivation or desires do not only count in virtue of the attraction of the consummations but also in virtue of the kind of life and kind of subject that these desires properly belong to’ (ibid.).

Then Taylor concludes, ‘a reflection on the kind of beings we are takes us to the centre of our existence as agents. Strong evaluation is not just condition of articulacy about preferences, but also about the quality of life, the kind of being we are or want to be. It is in this sense deeper’ (ibid., p.26)

4.5.3 The nature of strong evaluation

What needs to be clarified first are Taylor’s uses of strong evaluation and strong evaluations. Taylor generally uses the uncountable form of the term to refer to the process of evaluation. There are different interpretations of this process. Some commentators think strong evaluation is a kind of reflection (e.g. Rosen 1991, Weinstock 1994, Anderson 1996, Flanagan 1996, Smith, 1996; Gutting 1999; Edgar 1995), some consider it to be a kind of deliberation (Smith 2002), some regard it as a pre-understanding (Laitinen 2003), and some others treat it as an intuitive judgement or response (Abbey 2000, p.19). Some of these interpretations might have right aspects of their own. For example, one can find an interpretation of strong evaluation as reflection on one’s life. This is an interpretation that originated from Taylor’s discussion on the relationship between strong evaluation and self-responsibility in his essay ‘What is human Agency’. However, I am inclined to agree with Ruth Abbey’s (2000) interpretation of strong evaluation as an intuitive judgement and response,
because her interpretations are much closer to what Taylor mainly means, particular in his later works. This can evidently be seen in Taylor’s detailed discussion about the notion of moral intuition or response at the beginning of his book Sources of the Self (see Taylor 1989). In his later work Taylor further explains:

‘I don’t consider it a condition of acting out of a strong evaluation that one has articulated and critically reflected on one’s framework…I mean simply that one is operating with a sense that some desires, goals, aspirations are qualitatively higher than others’ (Taylor 1994, p.249; cf. 1995b, p.140 cited in Abbey 2000, p.20).

Abbey further interprets this meaning as following:

‘The meaning of evaluation in this context is closer to an intuitive judgement or response than to the outcome of a reasoned, reflective process. As we shall see, Taylor does believe that the underpinnings of strong evaluation can be articulated to some extent, but this is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of strong evaluation. He contends that individuals always make these sorts of qualitative judgements even if they are unaware that they are doing so and even if they are oblivious to the bigger moral picture that forms the background to their distinctions of worth’ (Abbey 2000, p.19).

In this sense, Taylor believes that strong evaluation is a condition of articulacy, not vice versa. Thus, Abbey concludes,

‘Ultimately, Taylor’s position on strong evaluation is that while individuals can be conscious of the moral judgements that underpin their strong evaluations, they need not be. Strongly valued goods need not be explicit or articulated in order to exercise a powerful influence on a person’s actions and sense of morality and purpose. Nor do these judgements have to be part of the person’s awareness to be valuable in explaining moral life. Instead, strongly valued goods can exist as part of the tacit background of their understanding (ibid.)’
I agree that strong evaluation as a process of intuitive judgement/response is closer to Taylor’s later thinking on the notion of strong evaluation and that we need not reflect on our strong evaluations in order to gain a better understanding of an individual’s moral life. However, I would suggest that it is exactly such kind of reflection in relation to strong evaluation that should draw our attention. It is exactly in his early discussion on strong evaluation and re-evaluation as a mode of reflection that we can find the significant implications for roles of learning in terms of one’s identity. As I will show, this process of reflection can be seen as a process of reflective learning concerning one’s life.

The plural form of strong evaluation, i.e. strong evaluations could be understood as specific ‘qualitative distinctions’ regarding certain desires or the objects of desires. However, Laitinen asserts that ‘strong evaluations’ are not literally second-order desires; rather, they are ‘evaluative beliefs’ or ‘strong convictions’ (Laitinen 2003, p.24-25, p. 30). I agree with Laitinen on this point because Taylor quite often describes strong evaluations as ‘judgements’, ‘standards’, ‘ends’ or ‘goods’ that are ‘independent of’ our own desires, inclinations, or choices which are judged by those standards or judgements (see Taylor 1985b, 220; 1989a, p.4, p.20). As Laitinen writes, ‘More often, it seems, strong evaluations are used to refer to the resulting (or preceding) strong preferences or strong convictions, the stable conceptions of the good’ (Laitinen 2003, p.30). Laitinen explains that ‘strong evaluation’ can be seen as ‘a matter of forming such evaluative beliefs’ (ibid., p.25). These ‘evaluative beliefs’ are: ‘…claims concerning evaluative aspects of the objects of evaluation (desires, actions, emotions, characters, ways of life, situations), and these claims may be mistaken, and liable to criticism’ (ibid.).
The criticisms levelled at the notion of strong evaluation might come from different moral assumptions/theories one holds. Taylor is critical of those moral theories that ignore ‘qualitative distinctions’. But what position does Taylor hold to affirm a ‘language of qualitative distinction’? According to Laitinen, in Taylor’s early articles, the process of strong evaluation can be interpreted in any subjectivist, communitarian and objectivist ways. However in his later works, Taylor’s interpretation of strong evaluation is explicitly directed towards a realist view.

4.5.4 Strong evaluations and self
Taylor maintains that the self is closely linked with strong evaluations. For Taylor, human beings are self-interpreting subjects (see 1985a, p.4) and ‘man is above all the language animal’ (ibid., p.216). Strong evaluation can be seen as a process of self-interpretation in the language of evaluative distinctions, which is in fact a kind of self-evaluation. This tight relationship between self and strong evaluations can be seen in the following quotation from Taylor,

‘the human subject is such that the question arises inescapably, which kind of being he is going to realize. He is not just de facto a certain kind of being, with certain give desires, but it is somehow “up to” him what kind of being he is going to be’ (1976, p.281; see also ‘Introduction’, Taylor 1985a/b)

Here one can see that the close relationship between self and strong evaluations lies in self-interpretation and self-definition. Based on this link between self and strong evaluations, it is not difficult to understand why Taylor considers that the link between identity and strong evaluations is essentially tight. He considers that strong evaluations are constitutive of identity. As he writes, ‘Our identity is defined by our fundamental evaluations’ (Taylor 1985a, p.34). This characteristic is absent in weak
evaluations, a feature that also represents a key difference between strong and weak evaluations.

### 4.5.5 Strong evaluations, agency and identity

According to Taylor, the essential relationship between *fundamental/basic* strong evaluations and identity originates from the link between strong evaluations and *agency*. As has been shown above, in terms of the ‘depth’, ‘strong evaluation is not just a condition of articulacy about preferences, but also about the quality of the kind of being we are or want to be’ (ibid., p.26). Taylor asserts, ‘…a reflection on the kind of beings we are takes us to the centre of our existence as agents’ (ibid.). An individual’s strong evaluations give judgement to the quality of the life he/she wants to live and kind of person he/she wants to be.

Taylor defines his notion of identity in relation to strong evaluations as following,

‘… the term where we talk about “finding one’s identity”, or going through an “identity crisis”. Now our identity is defined by our fundamental evaluations. The answer to the question “what is my identity?” cannot be given by any list of properties of other ranges about my physical description, provenance, background, capacities, and so on. All these can figure in my identity, but only as assumed in a certain way’ (ibid., p.34).

If ‘my identity’, or ‘what I have become’, or ‘where I come from’ or in Taylor’s words, ‘my being of a certain lineage’ is of central importance to me, then this is my self-concern. If I see this identity as ‘conferring on me membership in a certain class of people whom I see as marked off by certain qualities which I value in myself as an agent and which come to me from this background, then it will be part of my identity’ (ibid.). Now, ‘my lineage’ as part of my identity
is bound up with certain qualities I value as an agent. It is here that one can perceive that identity is bound up with certain strong evaluations which are inseparable from certain modes of human agency.

‘I identify myself by my strong evaluations, as someone who essentially has these convictions’, or else I see certain of my other properties as admitting of only one kind of strong evaluation by myself, because these properties so centrally touch what I am as an agent, that is as a strong evaluator, that I cannot really repudiate them in the full sense. For I would be thereby repudiating myself, inwardly riven, and hence incapable of fully authentic evaluation’ (ibid.).

Thus according to Taylor, our identity is defined by ‘certain evaluations which are inseparable from ourselves as agents’ (ibid.). In other words, essential strong evaluations are constitutive of identity, because they provide the indispensable horizon or framework within which we both recognize and self-define ourselves by our agency as strong evaluators. This mode of human agency largely amounts to human orientation to the good in the ‘moral space’ discussed in Taylor’s later work *Sources of the Self* (1989). To lose this horizon or framework, or not to have found it, is experiencing ‘disorientation’, or ‘identity-crisis’ (see Taylor 1989, p.27).

### 4.5.6 Strong evaluations, agent and person

Taylor asserts that the link between strong evaluation and agency is a requirement to be a *person*. Taylor claims that the ‘horizons’ or ‘limits’ defined by certain strong evaluations are essentially important for human agency. As he writes, ‘...the claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood’ (Taylor 1989, p.27). Without such evaluations,
according to Taylor, we will suffer a series of damages as a person. As he argues,

‘...shorn of these we would lose the very possibility of being an agent who evaluates; that our existence as persons, and hence our ability to adhere as persons to certain evaluations, would be impossible outside the horizon of these essential evaluations, that we would break down as persons, be incapable of being person in the full sense’ (1985a., p.34-5).

To put it in a nutshell, the existence of fundamental strong evaluations is constitutive of human agency in the sense that such agency makes being a human person possible. Identity is defined by fundamental strong evaluations in the sense that self-recognition and self-definition largely originate from strong evaluations which are inseparable from the self as an agent.

4.5.7 Two modes of reflections

What should be distinguished here are two different modes of ‘reflection’ in relation to strong evaluation. Firstly, strong evaluation as a framework in second-order desires always poses a self-evaluative judgement or response to certain desires or objects of desire, both consciously and unconsciously. In Taylor’s view, this evaluative process is human universal. Although an individual can be conscious of the moral judgements that underpin their strong evaluations, they need not be. One reason for this is that the moral ontology behind one’s views can remain largely implicit (Taylor 1989, p.9), or is not articulated. In this sense, this mode of reflection can be understood as either conscious or unconscious reflection.

Secondly, a mode of conscious reflection might be identified in our deliberate articulation of our implicit strong evaluations. There are also two levels of
reflections in this mode of reflection. First, Taylor agrees with the Socratic belief in the value of examined life (Taylor 1989a, p.92), i.e., *an unexamined life is not worth living*. Taylor holds that a strong evaluator has the capacity of articulating the implicit strong evaluative background and that this inclination is stronger in his early work (e.g. Taylor 1985a). He writes, ‘Our strong evaluations may be called contrast articulations...they are attempt to formulate what is initially inchoate, or confused, or badly formulated’ (Taylor 1985a, p.25). He therefore claims, ‘To be a strong evaluator is thus to be capable of a reflection which is more articulate’ (ibid.). Thus according to Taylor, such a reflection is not a *must* for individuals, that is, they do not need to do such reflection. But Taylor believes that it will be good for individuals to do such reflection given his agreement on Socratic belief. Such reflection can be conducted *within* or *among* strong evaluative frameworks/backgrounds and it ‘will draw people to particular moral outlook and that inspire them to act in accordance with it’ (Abbey 2000, p.41).

Secondly perhaps more importantly in the modern sense, Taylor believes that an individual also has the capacity to *re-evaluate* his/her basic strong evaluations. In Taylor’s word, it is a ‘radical re-evaluation’ that will call the framework, which has already been formulated by individuals, into question (see Taylor 1985a, p.40-42). ‘Radical re-evaluation’, is, ‘the most basic terms, those in which other evaluations are carried on, are precisely what is in question’ (Taylor 1985a, p.40). As Taylor argues,

‘This radical evaluation is a deep reflection, and a self-reflection in a special sense: it is a reflection about the self, its most fundamental issues and reflection which engages the self most wholly and deeply’ (ibid.,p.42).
What emerges from this reflection will be a ‘self-resolution’ to the self in question, a new definition of fundamental (strong) evaluations that are essential to one’s identity. Radical re-evaluation, in my view, is similar to Taylor’s notion of ‘radical reflexivity’. As Abbey suggests, ‘This term refers to a focus on the self qua self, the turning of attention toward what sort of self it is that has experiences of knowing, feeling and so on’ (Abbey 2000, p.83). Taylor contrasts general reflexivity and radical reflexivity in the following way:

‘If I attend to my wounded hand, or begin (belately) to think about the state of my soul instead of about worldly success, I am indeed concerned with myself, but not yet radically. I am not focusing on myself as the agent of experience and making this my object...Radical reflexivity brings to the fore a kind of presence to oneself which is inseparable from one’s being the agent of experience’ (Taylor 1989a 130-131 cited in Abbey 2000, p.84).

4.6 Identity and the good

4.6.1 How identity is linked with the good?

Taylor maintains that identity cannot be separated from the good. The link between the notion of identity and the notion of the good can be brought to light as following. Taylor’s notion of ‘moral orientation’ to the good as a condition of moral identity can be understood as his notion of ‘strong evaluation’ in relation to moral identity. One seeks and finds frameworks in moral space. He argues, ‘To understand our predicament in terms of finding or losing orientation in moral space is to take the space which our frameworks seek to define as ontologically basic’ (Taylor 1989, p.29). He then expounds this point thus, ‘...we take as basic that the human agent exists in a space of questions. And these are the questions to which our framework-definitions are answers, providing the horizon within which we know where we stand, and what meanings things have for us’ (ibid.). These questions are moral questions in Taylor’s view, and are questions about ‘good’ and ‘worthiness’ which our
framework can offer us answers, enables us to hold a place in relation to other interlocutors and affords meanings to our lives. Hence, Taylor thinks that ‘orientation to the good’ is one of the basic conditions of identity, or of one’s life making sense (see ibid., p.51). Following on from this we can see there is a necessary connection between an orientation towards the good and identity, and this connection is inescapable in Taylor’s view (see ibid., p.51-52).

The ‘moral space in question’, Taylor argues, must be mapped by strong evaluations or qualitative distinctions (see ibid., p.29). The role of strong evaluation here, similar to orientation, is inescapable, because it is the condition needed in order for one to judge what is of worth or significance to him/her in this space. Taylor shows us the fundamental role of strong evaluation in guiding us in the moral space,

‘...it only plays the role of orienting us, of providing the frame within which things have meaning for us, by virtue of the qualitative distinctions it incorporates...Our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not. It is what makes possible these discriminations, including those which turn on strong evaluations. It hence couldn’t be entirely without such evaluations. The notion of an identity defined by some mere de facto, not strongly valued preference is incoherent’ (Taylor 1989, p.30).

This is why Taylor claims that ‘our identity is defined by our fundamental evaluations’ (Taylor 1985, p.34). Further, according to Taylor, certain fundamental/essential strong evaluations that define our identity provide the horizon, framework or standards for other or less fundamental strong evaluations one makes.

A more basic question however is: where do strong evaluations come from? There must be an ontological background from which those strong evaluations
appear. I wish to explore this question in the following sections. To give a simple answer now, Taylor suggests, this background is something about constitutive good (see ibid., p.92) or more generally, strong values (see Smith 2000). Constitutive good presents itself in ‘moral’ concern. So, if strong evaluations orientate us in moral space to move us towards the good we prefer, then, it is constitutive good that provides standards and motivations that form our fundamental strong evaluations. But what is ‘constitutive good’? How exactly should we understand Taylor’s notion of ‘good’?

4.6.2 How should we understand the notion of the good?
One might need to know that the notion of ‘the good’ in Taylor’s usage is in a broad sense. In my understanding, ‘good’ in Taylor’s language is not opposite to the meaning of the ‘bad’ or the ‘evil’ in its narrow sense. As one can see, at the very beginning of the Part I of Sources of the Self, Taylor points out that contemporary moral philosophy focuses on what is right and wrong, but gives no attention to a place for ‘a notion of the good as the object of our love or allegiance or, as Iris Murdoch portrayed it in her work, as the privileged focus of attention or will’ (Taylor 1989, p.3, emph. added). Thus, the notion of the good that Taylor hopes to explore in his work could be understood beyond a narrow moralistic sense. As Smith asserts, ‘[T]he link Taylor makes between identity and the good is premised on a non-moralistic, expansive understanding of the good’ (Smith 2002, p.95).

In Taylor’s view, the good can be generally seen as ‘life good’, and ‘hypergood’ ‘constitutive good’. I will discuss these terms separately as the following.

(1) Life good
To use Taylor’s own words, ‘good’ or sometimes what he calls ‘strong good’ means:
‘...whatever is picked out as incomparably higher in a qualitative distinction. It can be some action, or motive, or style of life, which is seen as qualitatively superior. “Good” is used here in a highly general sense, designating anything considered valuable, worthy, admirable, of whatever kind or category’ (Taylor 1989a, p.92, emph. added).

The notion of the good may refer to a dimension of morality within the broad domain of Taylor’s moral theory which I will discuss thoroughly in section 4.7. Taylor uses the term ‘moral concern’ to overarch the issues of what is right or wrong, better or worse, and higher or lower, through which he means to show that both ‘moral’ and ethical issues cannot be separated from what he calls ‘strong evaluations’. Thus, it is not difficult to understand that the meaning of term ‘good’ is expanded and is used to refer to a central dimension of Taylor’s moral theory.

Taylor uses the metaphorical term ‘moral space’ to accommodate the questions about the good. This link can be analysed through Taylor’s discussion about moral space and qualitative distinction. ‘Moral space’, Taylor writes, is ‘a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary’ (Taylor 1989, p.28). When probing deeper into the term ‘questions’, one may see that these are questions about qualitative distinctions. These are certain criteria or standards provided by certain ‘higher’ values, ideals, or more generally, goods. He gives these examples as follows, ‘One form of life may be seen as fuller, another way of feeling and acting as purer, a mode of feeling or living as deeper, a style of life as more admirable, a given demand as making as absolute claim against other merely relative ones, and so on’ (ibid., p.20). For Taylor, all these goods share a commonality expressed in the term ‘incomparable’. He explains it further thus:
‘In each of these cases, the sense is that there are ends or goods which are worthy or desirable in a way that cannot be measured on the same scale as our ordinary ends, goods, desirabilia. They are not just more desirable, in the sense though to a great degree, than some of these ordinary goods are. Because of their special status they command our awe, respect or admiration’ (ibid., p.20).

So, these ‘incomparable’ goods are themselves responses of our qualitative distinctions or strong evaluations. As Taylor puts it,

‘…the fact that these ends or goods stand independent of our own desires, inclinations, or choices, that they represent standards by which these desires and choices are judged. These are obviously two linked facets of the same sense of higher worth. The goods which command our awe must also function in some sense as standards for us’ (ibid.).

Taylor calls these types of goods as life goods (see ibid, p. 93), because these goods are about qualitative distinctions between actions, or feelings, or modes of life, which are facets or components of a good life.

(2) Constitutive good

But where do strong evaluations or qualitative distinctions that define ‘life goods’ come from? Smith contends that strong evaluations originate from certain standards or criteria provided by strong values. ‘Strong values are “goods” in the meaning that Aristotle gave to the term: “desirable things which are worthy of desire” (see Smith 2002, p.91). In this sense, strong values are more fundamental than strong evaluations (see ibid.). But ‘strong value’ interpreted by Smith is tantamount to, in my understanding, what Taylor calls constitutive good. According to Taylor, constitutive good is what constitutes or defines the good actions, feelings or motives in daily life. In addition,’[t]he constitutive
good is a moral source...that is, it is a something the love of which empowers us to do and be good’ (Taylor 1989, p.93). Indeed, constitutive good provides the source of strong evaluations, or it is a ‘moral source’ of a self. Constitutive good might be, for example, the Idea of the Good in Plato’s moral theory, an understanding of God, or the image of the autonomous human agent and his/her ability to act out of respect for the moral law in Kantian ethics, etc..

(3) Hypergood

In an age of pluralism, most Western modern persons are moved by many goods, that is, many values of worth, within or between multiple moral frameworks, but Taylor suggests that it is the most important one for ourselves that define our essential identity. For example, worship of God has an overriding importance among many modern goods for some people, or it might be value of social justice, or value of family life.

‘Most of us not only live with many goods, but find that we have to rank them, and in some cases, this ranking makes one of them of supreme importance relative to the others (ibid., p.62).

According to Taylor, there are higher-order and lower-order qualitative distinctions (ibid. p.63). Our higher-order qualitative distinctions help us discriminate among many goods, attribute differential worth or importance to them, or decide when and if to follow them. Our lower-order qualitative distinctions define the most important goods for us, or our strongly valued goods, which are ‘higher goods’ compared with other goods. As Taylor says, ‘A higher-order qualitative distinction itself segments goods which themselves are defined by lower-order distinctions’ (ibid.). He further writes, ‘Let me call higher-order goods of this kind ‘hypergoods’, i.e., ‘goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from
which these must be weighed, judged, decided about’ (ibid.). Taylor even claims that the hypergood is the central feature of an individual’s identity. He writes,

‘It is orientation to this which comes closest to defining my identity, and therefore my direction to this good is of unique importance to me. Whereas I naturally want to be well placed in relation to all and any of the goods I recognize and to be moving towards rather than away from them, my direction in relation to this good has a crucial importance’ (ibid.)

In conclusion, the term ‘good’ according to Taylor is generally referred to as something that is qualitatively higher by which our daily desires and choices are judged and something that evoke our respect/love. The former is ‘life good’; the latter is ‘constitutive good’. Hypergoods are the higher goods after comparing and ranking many goods according to qualitative distinctions in one’s life.

4.6.3 Three axes of ‘the good’

Taylor classifies three axes or dimensions of ‘the good’, the moral concerns or moral thinking that he supposes could be found in any form or another in all cultures (see ibid., p.16). They are: (1) our sense of respect for and obligations to others, i.e. the concern, love or respect for ‘other human beings’, which includes the rights, duties, obligations and responsibilities one should have in relation to other human beings; (2) our understandings of what makes a full life, which is about our understandings of what makes a full, worthwhile and meaningful life. This dimension seems to fit properly into a conception of the good; (3) notions concerned with dignity, including the sense of dignity, a feeling of self-worth (see ibid., p.15). For Taylor, ‘Frameworks provide the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgements, intuitions, or
reactions in any of the three dimensions’ (ibid., p.26). He claims that it is the second dimension of the good that is in trouble in our age (see ibid., p.18).

4.7 Taylor’s moral theory in relation to the notion of the good

4.7.1 Taylor’s moral domain

The moral domain that Taylor discusses is broader than the field that much contemporary moral philosophy focuses on. For Taylor, the latter is limited by focusing too much on the conceptions on right, duty and obligations in an individual’s relationship to others, and only debates questions about what is correct thing to do in such relationships. It gives no attention to what is good to be and rarely explores the nature of the good life. As he puts it, ‘...it has no conceptual place left for a notion of the good as the object of our love or allegiance or, as Iris Murdoch portrayed it in her work, as the privileged focus of attention or will’ (ibid., p.3).

Taylor expands contemporary moral philosophy by incorporating the questions about what is good to be. By ‘enlarging our range of legitimate moral descriptions’ (ibid.). Taylor argues for ‘a gamut of views a bit broader than what is normally described as “moral”’ (ibid., p.4), that is, to bring out and examine ‘the richer background languages in which we set the basis and point of the moral obligations we acknowledge’ (ibid., p.3). Besides notions and reactions on issues of justice, respect for other people’s life, well-being and dignity, Taylor wants to explore further ‘our sense of what underlies our own dignity, or questions about what makes our lives meaningful or fulfilling’ (ibid., p.4).

Abbey clarifies that some thinkers (e.g. Williams 1985, Foucault 1978-88, 1998) use the terms morality and ethics to refer respectively to the distinction between
what it is right to do and what it is good to be. They see morality as being about universalizable rules and codes of conduct that should govern other-regarding actions, while ethics is concerned with questions about the self, meaning and fulfilment in life (see Abbey 2000, p.11). Taylor’s distinction between what it is right to do and what it is good to be accords with Ricoeur’s treatment of these two notions as I mentioned in Chapter 3, but he does not adopt the term ‘distinction’ at all. Instead, he uses the term morality to encompass both meanings. What is the underlying reason for Taylor’s use of the term morality to cover the domain of ethics? Abbey suggests: ‘A major reason for using the term morality in this more comprehensive way is his belief that questions about right action and meaning or fulfilment in life both involve strong evaluation (Abbey 2000, p.11). One can perceive Taylor’s intention through his own words,

‘What they have in common with moral issues, and what deserves the vague term ‘spiritual’, is that they all involve what I have called elsewhere ‘strong evaluation’, that is, they involve discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged’ (Taylor 1989, p.4)

Taylor also writes, ‘“Morality”, of course, can be and often is defined purely in terms of respect for others. The category of the moral is thought to encompass just our obligations to other people. But if we adopt this definition then we have to allow that there are other questions beyond the moral which are of central concern to us, and which bring strong evaluation into play’ (ibid., p.14). Taylor believes, ‘respect for others’ and ‘our notions of a full life’ are ‘not two quite separate orders of ideas. There is a substantial overlap or, rather, a complex relation in which some of the same basic notions reappear in a new way’ (ibid., p.15). In this sense, Taylor uses the term ‘morality’ beyond the
scope of what is normally discussed in moral theory, which mainly deals with the notions of right, duty and obligation. Rather, he discusses the notion of ‘the good’, in its expansive meaning, i.e., respect for others, meaningful life and self-worth, in his ‘broader’ moral theory. This is done on the grounds that he believes ‘moral issues’ are commonly related to the notion of ‘strong evaluation’ (premised on the notion of ‘the goods’ or ‘strong values’) which he considers essential to human agency.

### 4.7.2 Moral ontology

Taylor’s use of the word ‘moral’, is based on a broader and deeper understanding of the ‘moral intuitions’ of human beings. Firstly, these moral intuitions are different from other moral reactions as the consequence of upbringing and education. As he explains, ‘There seems to be a natural, inborn compunction to inflict death or injury on another, an inclination to come to the help of the injured or endangered’ (ibid., p.5). Secondly, Taylor thinks that these ‘instincts’ receive a variable cultural shape and this shape is inseparable from an account of what it is that commands our respect. He then thinks that ‘the account seems to articulate intuition’ (ibid.). This analysis of moral intuition makes Taylor introduce his notion of moral ontology. As he expounds,

‘Our moral reactions in this domain have two facets, as it were. On one side, they are almost like instincts, comparable to love of sweet things, or our aversion to nauseous substances, or our fear of falling; on the other, they seem to involve claims, implicit or explicit, about the nature and status of human beings. From this second side, a moral reaction is an assent to, an affirmation of, a given ontology of the human’ (ibid.)

Thus, in Taylor’s view, the whole way in which we think, reason, argue, and question ourselves about morality supposes that our moral reactions are not
only ‘gut’ feelings but also implicit acknowledgements of claims concerning their objects. And Taylor stresses that it is exactly ‘the various ontological accounts’ that try to articulate these claims (ibid., p.7). In this sense, according to Taylor, ‘a background picture’ or a ‘moral ontology’ not only lies behind our moral intuitions, but also enables us to articulate our moral intuitions. As he puts it,

‘What is articulated here is the background we assume and draw on in any claim to rightness, part of which we are forced to spell out when we have to defend our responses as the right ones’ (ibid., p.9)

Thus Taylor believes that the moral ontology behind any person’s views can remain largely implicit. One reason for this might be that ontological accounts ‘are rather remote from our everyday descriptions by which we deal with people around us and ourselves’ (ibid., p.7). According to Taylor only some challenges or controversies between different moral ontological accounts might force one’s own account to the fore. Another reason that makes articulation of moral ontology difficult is related to modern pluralism. In Taylor’s words this is, ‘the tentative, searching, uncertain nature of many of our moral beliefs’ (ibid., p.10). For him, this is an essentially modern predicament.

4.7.3 Articulation of moral frameworks

Taylor maintains that many of the strongly held values, and even moral frameworks, by which people live often go unacknowledged and continue to be implicit, remaining in the background of their awareness. Only in times of controversy, conflict or crisis, is one forced to articulate the assumptions of his/moral values (see Taylor 1989, p.9). In accordance with Taylor’s views, without any articulation of moral ontology, we would lose contact with the
good (see ibid., p.97), though we do not have to do so. However, Taylor offers two justifications for us to make an articulation of the good.

Firstly, Taylor believes articulation of implicit goods can be seen as a way of conducting an examination on one’s lives, which is a Socratic view (see Taylor 1989, p.92). This reading of articulation can thus be seen as a mode of self-reflection because this type of articulation deepens one’s understanding of moral values and moral responses by showing what underpins them, and thus acquire a deeper and broader self-knowledge (see Abbey 2000, p.41; Taylor 1989, p.26, p.80, p.92).

Secondly, Taylor stresses that articulation can make an individual make contact with constitutive goods and this empowers/enables him/her to live up to those goods. As Taylor writes, ‘articulation can bring us closer to the good as a moral source, can give it power’ (Taylor 1989a, p.92).

‘Moral sources empower. To come closer to them, to have a clearer view of them, to come to grasp what they involve, is for those who recognize them to be moved to love or respect them, and through this love/respect to be better enabled to live up to them. And articulation can bring them closer’ (ibid., p.96).

Also, Taylor argues, ‘A formulation has power when it brings the source close, when it makes it plain and evident, in all its inherent force, its capacity to inspire our love, respect, or allegiance. An effective articulation releases this force, and this is how words have power (ibid.).

It is here we can see that narrative plays a key role in the articulation of the good. Taylor believes we can be empowered ‘by articulating our feelings or our story so as to bring us in contact with a source we have been longing for.”
This may come about through the recasting of our lives in a new *narrative* (ibid., p.97). Here one can see this is where narrative as a form of articulation comes in. Taylor points out that ‘One way in which people do this (narrative) is to relate their story to a greater pattern of history, as the realization of a good’ (ibid.). ‘It’s almost as these schematic historical narratives exercised a force of attraction of their own. The secret of their strength is their capacity to confer *meaning* and *substance* on people’s lives’ (ibid., emph. added). It thus follows that to learn to articulate the good can empower people to live up to that good, and narrative is a powerful form of articulation with which to do this.

Taylor also points out that the people who articulate are not necessarily the actors themselves, they can also be others. He writes, ‘The agent himself or herself is not necessarily the best authority, at least not at the outset’ (ibid., p.9). But eventually, the agent may put others’ interpretations into his own, and then self-interpretation will be significant. As he writes, ‘things have significance for me, and the issue of my identity is worked out, only through a language of interpretation which I have come to accept as a valid articulation of these issues’ (ibid., p.34). In this sense, the role of learning concerning one’s identity not only lies in one’s own self-constructed interpretations, but also lies in others’ narratives and interpretations, though others’ interpretations are subject to one’s acceptance.

### 4.7.4 A moral realism

Taylor divides strong evaluations into ‘fundamental/essential’ evaluations (higher-order qualitative distinction) and ‘less basic ones’ (lower-order qualitative distinction). Essential evaluations ‘provide the horizon or foundation for the other evaluations one makes’ (See Taylor 1985a, p.39).
However, something ‘qualitatively higher’ concerning worth must be assumed as judgements for the operation of essential strong evaluations. It is here that Taylor links the notion of strong evaluations to his concept of the ‘good’, the qualitative higher in terms of the judgement of worthiness. According to Taylor, such ‘good’ is strongly valued and is independent of an individual’s desires, inclinations and choices. As he says,

‘I want to speak of strong evaluation when the goods putatively identified are not seen as constituted as good by the fact that we desire them, but rather are seen as normative for desire. That is, they are seen as goods which we ought to desire, even if we do not, goods such that we show ourselves up as inferior or bad by our not desiring them’ (1985b, p.120).

However, how the ‘good’ comes into an individual’s mind is not further explained by Taylor. One can only perceive that such good is closely related to what Taylor mentions about ‘moral ontology’ which involves ‘ontological claims’, implicit or explicit, concerning objects (See Taylor 1989a, p.5). Hence, moral ‘ontological claims’ can be roughly seen as strongly valued ‘good’, or ‘constitutive good’. This is an idea that I have introduced earlier. Such ‘good’, therefore, like the second facet of ‘moral intuition’ discussed before, is formed unconsciously as a result of internalization, i.e. by receiving ‘variable shape in culture’ (ibid.) and acquired by the dialogical self in his/her conversation with significant others who have been the result of internalization of certain culture. In this sense, we can understand that this ‘moral ontology’ is realist in Taylor’s view. As he writes,

‘...the fact that these ends or goods stand independent of our own desires, inclination, or choices, that they represent standards by which these desires and choices are judged’ (ibid., p.20).
Many critics criticise Taylor for his moral realism because it holds that moral values exist independently of human beings (e.g., MacIntyre 1996, p.523; Morgan 1994, p.52-3). Some commentators however, interpret that Taylor’s moral realism is based on his human ‘engaged’ view (e.g., Abbey 2000, p.27; Laitinen 2003, p.12). These interpretations originated from Taylor’s phenomenological inclinations in his moral theory and philosophical anthropology. It has been argued that this inclination is particularly influenced by Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger (See Smith 2004, Laitinen 2003). The ‘engaged view’, as Laitinen writes, is that ‘in living their lives, humans orient actively towards the world and participate in practices and engage in various meaningful activities, encountering demands and realizing values’ (Laitinen 2003, p.12). Based on this premise, it is not difficult to understand what Taylor’s moral realism really means. As Taylor claims,

‘We sense in the very experience of being moved by some higher good that we are moved by what is good in it rather than that it is valuable because of our reaction. We are moved by seeing its point as something infinitely valuable. We experience our love for it as a well-founded love’ (1989a, p.74; cf., p.341).

Thus, Taylor’s moral realism could be seen from an ‘engaged’ or ‘embodied’ view, i.e. human’s experience of morality. It is then argued by Abbey (2002) that Taylor’s moral realism is not a ‘strong realism’ and she thus creates a new term for Taylor’s moral realism, that is, ‘falsifiable realism’ (see Abbey 2000, p. 26-31).

While these ‘engaged views’ may interpret the above mentioned claims as empirical ones, we can also read them as philosophical claims made by Taylor for his transcendental argument. All those claims about moral realism can be seen as the assumptions or conditions of the possibility of the claim that strong
evaluation is a human universal. We have to assume that those conditions are like that; otherwise, strong evaluation is not possible or doesn’t make sense. The notion of ‘falsifiable realism’ collapses the distinction between empirical claims and philosophical claims, and therefore the interpretation in this line of thought might be incorrect.

In short, Taylor’s notion of strong evaluation originated from ‘constitutive good’. The ‘good’ is not something coming from human’s desires, will or choices. Nor is it merely the fact that an individual operates according to their affirmation of their values. Rather, human beings experience the ‘goods’ that command their respect and admiration in a non-anthropocentric manner, as standards for other desires or choices.

4.8 Identity and meaning of life

4.8.1 The link between identity and meaning of life

As I mentioned before, Taylor contends that the self exists in a space of questions concerning quality of life and kinds of being and thus his version of ‘self’ is a mode of self-concern. I also suggested that the second dimension of the good is about understandings about what makes a full life. If this is so then it is not difficult for us to understand his argument that,

‘The questions or concerns touch on the nature of the good that I orient myself by and on the way I am placed in relation to it. But then what counts as a unit will be defined by the scope of the concern, by just what is in question. And what is in question is, generally and characteristically, the shape of my life as a whole’ (Taylor 1989, p.50).

My life as a whole is my concern and therefore how I conduct myself is a question for me because it gives the significance, worth or value to my personal identity as a moral being. As Taylor claims,
‘My point is that the goods which define our spiritual orientation are the ones by which we will measure the worth of our lives; the two issues are indissolubly linked because they relate to the same core, and that is why I want to speak of the second issue, about the worth, or weight, or substance of my life, as a question of how I am “placed’ or ‘situated’ in relation to the good, or whether I am in “contact” with it’ (ibid., p.42).

Here Taylor is actually talking about two basic ranges of questions that arise when making sense of human lives. For the first range of questions, they ‘can arise of the “worthwhileness” or “meaningfulness” of one’s life, of whether it is (or has been) rich and substantial, or empty and trivial’ (ibid., p.43). These are questions about orientation. As he argues, ‘[N]ot being able to function without orientation in the space of the ultimately important means not being able to stop caring where we sit in it’ (ibid., p.42). According to Taylor, questions about orientation cannot be separated from questions of direction. Linked by the first range of questions, another range of questions arises for us that are concerned with ‘whether our lives have unity, or whether one day is just following the next without purpose or sense, the past falling into a kind of nothingness which is not the prelude, or harbinger, or opening, or early stage of anything…’(ibid., p.43). These are questions about directions of lives.

In terms of questions about directions of life, Taylor might be attacked for a moralistic view that he assumes that only some lives are worthwhile because these lives have direction and purpose. However, one can defend Taylor’s position by referring to his claim that strong evaluation is human universal. Strong evaluation is about quality of life and kinds of being, a sense of difference between mere life and ‘good’ life. Living without orientation (strong evaluation) is just ‘mere life’, which for Taylor would not be a ‘human universal’. Orientation towards strongly valued good is bound up with
‘direction vis-à-vis that good’, i.e. how to be in contact with that good. Thus, Taylor’s notion of ‘direction of life’ is not a biased ‘moralistic’ view; it is about ‘one of the most basic aspirations of human beings’ (ibid, p.42)

‘Direction of lives’, suggests Taylor, is about ‘our most fundamental motivation, or our basic allegiance, or the outer limits of relevant possibilities for us, and hence the direction our lives were moving in or could move in’ (ibid., p.46). Taylor contends that issues of human condition cannot be restricted to what we *are*, because we are also always changing and *becoming*. We experience our life course from infancy, childhood, and adolescence to adulthood when we become autonomous agents and have our own places relative to the good we value. Even if we hold that place, it is still challenged by new events of lives and is possibly revised through our increased experience and growing maturation. Taylor writes, ‘So the issue for us has to be not only where we are, but where we’re *going*’ (ibid., p.47). In this sense, Taylor states by establishing that there are not only ‘more or less questions’/‘relative questions’ which are about how near or far in relation to what we see as the good, but also ‘yes or no’/‘absolute’ questions which concerns the direction of our lives, i.e. moving towards or away from the good, or concerns the source of our motivations in regard to this good (see ibid, p.45-47). Taylor claims that ‘an absolute question always frames our relative ones’ (ibid., p.47). In other words, the answer of how far or near I am in relation to my valued good depends on the strength of the motivation/allegiance that moves me towards that good *and/or* how externally limited the relevant possibilities for me to move closer to that good are.

To sum up, the questions about *directions* of lives defined by the questions about *orientations* to the valued good provide the guidelines and standards to
answer the questions about how I am in contact with that good, and ‘gives me a sense of wholeness, of fullness of being as a person or self, that nothing else can’ (ibid., p.63).

4.8.2 Problematic modern identity

Taylor claims that it is the struggle of a modern person in finding the meaning of his/her life that puts the problems of identity on our agenda. Given that one important area I am investigating in this thesis is about learning in relation to identity, I want to focus now on the second axis of the good, i.e., the pursuit of a unity, the meaning, and/or the worthiness of life, which is the central dimension that makes personal identity matter to us.

In Taylor’s view, the frameworks that define our identity today in the West is problematic. ‘None forms the horizon of the whole society in the modern West’ (ibid., p.17). He points out,

‘What is common to them all is the sense that no framework is shared by everyone, can be taken for granted as the framework tout court, can sink to the phenomenological status of unquestioned fact. This basic understanding refracts differently in the stances people take’ (ibid.)

Taylor argues, ‘Moderns therefore anxiously doubt whether life has meaning, or wonder what its meaning is’ (ibid., p.16). The meaning of life as a modern concern can be analysed in three ways. Firstly, living in an age of pluralism, a modern person might feel him/herself in conflict concerning his/her personal identity since that identity is influenced by many different moral goods that might be at odds or are incompatible with one another. Taylor’s notion of hypergood, as I have discussed before, can be considered as an approach to deal with this predicament. This is because hypergood eases the tensions that occur
when finding the meaning of life in the age of pluralism, by ranking the order of many goods. As he writes, ‘For those with a strong commitment to such a good, what it means is that this above all others provides the landmarks for what they judge to be the direction of their lives’ (ibid., p.62).

Secondly, Taylor thinks the lack of meaning in modern life ‘might happen through personal inadequacy, but failure might also come from there being no ultimately believable framework’ (ibid., p.17, emph. added). He writes, ‘[N]ot to have a framework is to fall into a life which is spiritually senseless. The quest is thus always a quest for sense (ibid., p.18).

The third reason that ‘meaning’ features in modern life is the awareness of the importance of ‘articulation’ in the quest for the sense or meaning of life. He writes, ‘[W]e find the sense of life through articulating it. And moderns have become acutely aware of how much sense being there for us depends on our own powers of expression’ (ibid.). In respect of a third reason, there are two senses of talking about ‘meaning’ for moderns. Modern persons try to attain the meaning of life in the first sense, and when they do it, they create meaning depending on their ability to articulate it. It thus can be argued that since narrative has reflexive and temporal features, the latter sense can be seen as a necessity of narrative in quest of significance/meaning of one’s life. In this sense, narrative plays an essential role in exploring the sense of one’s identity.

4. 9 Why does moral identity need narrative?

4.9.1 Self-interpretation requires language

The assumption that Taylor has recourse to narrative to link with the identity problem comes from his philosophical anthropology. One of the reasons why he is thought of as a hermeneutical thinker is because he claims that human
beings are self-interpreting animals; our understandings of ourselves play a crucial, albeit not exhaustive, role in shaping who we are and what we do (see Taylor 1985a, p.202; 1989, p.34). He claims that self is much more about a certain mode of self-concern, that is, a kind of ‘caring’ about one’s ‘self’. In Taylor’s own words, ‘what I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me’ (Taylor 1989, p.34). Furthermore he asserts,

‘…these things have significance for me, and the issue of my identity is worked out, only through a language of interpretation which I have come to accept as a valid articulation of these issues. To ask what a person is, in abstraction from his or her self-interpretation, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn’t in principle be an answer’ (ibid.)

Taylor adds that his discussion of this point ‘owes a great deal to Heidegger and his thesis that understanding is the mode of being’ (ibid., p.524).

Consequently, for Taylor, self is partly constituted by its self-interpretation. But self-interpretation requires language. ‘To study persons is to study beings who only exist in, or are partly constituted by, a certain language’ (ibid., p.35). Self-interpretation uses language of one’s culture and community. The language ‘I’ use in self-interpretation is not something of ‘my’ own creation, but it is ‘our language’, the language provided by a culture and a society. ‘A language only exists and is maintained within a language community’ (ibid., p.35).

Thus, identity cannot be separable from the community one lives in and the language used in that community. As Taylor puts it, ‘the self-interpretations which define him [the individual] are drawn form the interchange which the
community carries on’ (Taylor1985a, p.8 cf. p.11, p.209; 1989, p.38). This suggests that self-interpretation, in one way, is a consequence of interaction between the self and the others in everyday life. In another way self-interpretation is the construction between self and social lives, or between personal stories and the history/tradition which is carried on by a social/cultural community. Both dimensions intertwine. As Taylor points out, ‘One way in which people do this (narrative) is to relate their story to a greater pattern of history, as the realization of a good’ (Taylor 1989a, p.97). ‘It’s almost as these schematic historical narratives exercised a force of attraction of their own. The secret of their strength is their capacity to confer meaning and substance on people’s lives’ (ibid.). Here, Taylor seems to suggest that narrative identity presents itself at both an interpersonal level and a moral/cultural/social level. It thus can be argued that narrative entails different dimensions and contains different layers of meanings to a person in terms of his/her identity. But narrative can be seen as a desirable form of self-interpretation in relation to the good at least because it contains the language of strong evaluation. Narrative therefore takes a significant role in articulating one’s moral assumptions or frameworks and in empowering one to live up to one’s moral sources.

4.9.2 Narrative is an inescapable temporal structure

As has been showed above, according to Taylor, ‘orientation to the good’ is one of the basic conditions in terms of defining an identity and is an inescapable structural requirement of human agency (Taylor 1989, p.51). But this does not exhaust the conditions of the understanding of identity, of making sense of our lives. According to Taylor, there are two other necessary conditions. His claim is that the ‘direction of lives’ is ‘another inescapable feature of human life’ (ibid., p.47). He argues for this point as following,
'Since we cannot do without an orientation to the good, and since we cannot be indifferent to our place relative to this good, and since this place is something that must always change and become, the issue of the direction of our lives must arise for us' (ibid., emph. added).

From the above, we can see in order to make sense of our identity in relation to the good, we must not only answer questions about orientation, but also questions about the direction of lives. However, the questions of direction of lives do not merely exist in the moral space, they also exist over human’s lifetime. In Taylor’s words, ‘Now we see that this sense of the good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story’ (ibid.). It is here we can see how Taylor inserts a necessary link between the notion of identity and narrative, thus claiming that narrative is ‘not an optional extra’ (ibid.).

Some critics consider that Taylor’s argument supporting a link between identity and narrative is not convincing in respect of its being ‘inescapable’ (see Smith 2002, p.97-102) and I will discuss this objection in a later part of this section. One of my interpretations of this point is that it is exactly the inescapability of the ‘direction of lives’ in relation to the good and its temporal dimension in human life that Taylor introduces as what he calls, ‘another basic condition of making sense of ourselves, that we grasp our lives in a narrative’ (Taylor 1989, p.47).

Taylor stresses that narrative reflects the temporal dimension of human life. As Taylor writes, ‘In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going’ (ibid.). Here we can see that the ‘direction of lives’ has an inherent temporal dimension, that is, we cannot give meaning to our present place related to the valued good without locating it in the temporal context of our lives, from past experiences to
the present life and to the future projects.

Here, Taylor appropriates Heidegger’s notion of ‘being-in-time’. He writes,

‘Heidegger, in Being and Time, described the inescapable temporal structure of being in the world; that from a sense of what we have become, among a range of present possibilities, we project our future being... Form my sense of where I am relative to it, and among the different possibilities, I project the direction of my life in a relation to it. My life always has this degree of narrative understanding, that I understand my present action in all form of an ‘and then’: there was A (what I am), and then I do B (what I project to become)’ (ibid.).

In this line of argument, Taylor’s notion of ‘sense-making’ of who I am is concerned with both a life history and a life project that can only be seen through narrative. In one way, he writes, ‘To the extent that we move back, we determine what we are by what we have become, by the story of how we got there’ (ibid., p.48). In another way Taylor proposes that, ‘As I project my life forward and endorse the existing direction or give it a new one, I project a future story, not just a state of momentary future but a bent for my whole life to come. This sense of my life as having a direction towards what I am not yet is what MacIntyre captures in his notion quoted above that life is seen as a “quest”’ (ibid. emph. added)

Taylor further suggests that one’s life direction towards good does not simply lie on linear time, but in non-linear human time.

‘We can see this in two dimensions, to past and future “ekstaseis” that Heidegger talks about. I don’t have a sense of where /what I am, as I argued above, without some understanding of how I have got there or become so. My sense of myself is of a being who is growing and becoming. In the very nature of things this cannot be instantaneous. It is not only that I need time and many incidents to sort out what is
relatively fixed and stable in my character, temperament and desires from what is variable and changing, though that is true. It is also that as a being who grows and becomes I can only know myself through the history of my maturation and regression, overcomings and defeats. My self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative’ (ibid., p.50)

From this quotation, Taylor suggests that how a narrative construction of life is not necessarily in linear temporality, i.e. in the linear order from the past to the present to the future as a linear ‘growing’ or ‘becoming’. The moral meaning of life is drawn from a moral theme of one’s human life. Such a moral theme is to be gained only when it is based on the consistence, coherence or integrity of one’s experiences and actions. The coherence and integrity of one’s experiences and actions can only be gained through a narrative articulation of one’s implicit moral framework and narrative understanding of various events and occurrences in one’s life course, through arranging them in a unique yet unitary way for a thematic unity of one’s life. This is why Taylor believes that our lives exist in a ‘space of questions’ that ‘only a coherent narrative can answer’ (ibid., p.47).

After considering these discussions, one can see that a synthesis of ‘thrownness’ and ‘projection’ presents a ‘wholeness’ of one’s life: we can understand various life events by localising them in the wider context of our lives as larger temporal wholes. Thus the different moments of life in relation to an understanding who we are have a direction towards a moral good. Therefore any human’s self-understanding inescapably occurs in time and requires some synthesises of the past, the present and the future. Here, Taylor is evidently resonant with Paul Ricoeur’s notion of emplotment. Taylor’s notion of narrative, to some extent, as Smith puts it, is ‘a vehicle of such synthesis’ (see Smith 2000, p.97). Such synthesis gives us a sense of ‘unity’ and
‘wholeness’ in our lives in the ‘space of questions’ about our ‘direction of lives’. Narrative thus can be seen as an inescapable temporal structure, incorporating both linear and nonlinear requirements, in making sense of our identity.

Taylor finally claims that the notions of ‘orientation to the good’, the ‘directions of our lives’, and narrative are thus essentially interconnected and they are basic conditions required for making sense of identity. He writes,

‘My underlying thesis is that there is a close connection between the different conditions of identity, or of one’s life making sense, that I have been discussing. One could put it this way: because we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and thus determine our place relative to it and hence determine the direction of our lives, we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a “quest”. But one could perhaps start from another point: because we have to determine our place in relation to the good, therefore we cannot be without an orientation to it, and hence must see our life in story’ (ibid., p.51-52).

4.9.3 Is narrative an inescapable structure?

But is narrative, like orientation towards the good and direction of life, an inescapable condition of identity as Taylor claims? Smith holds that if having an orientation towards the valued good and a sense of direction in relation to that good in our lives are inescapable for us to make sense of ourselves, we need not accept Taylor’s thesis that narrative identity is also ‘inescapable’. He argues that in talking about narratives, Taylor stresses that narratives’ strength lies in ‘their capacity to confer meaning and substance on people’s lives (see Taylor 1989, p.97). Smith then explains, ‘In Taylor’s view, the desire for such meaning is shared by all human beings. It is, in a phrase he sometimes invokes, an ‘anthropological constant’ (Smith 2002, p.100). Then, Smith contends, ‘…narrative self-understanding helps us lead more fully human lives, precisely by realizing the capacity we have for meaning and substance’ (Smith
2002, p.100). However he then argues that it is doubtful whether all the people have to realize this capacity in order to understand their lives and identity. Consequently, he concludes narrative identity may be only desirable, and thus we do not have to accept that narrative is ‘inescapable’ as Taylor maintains.

I agree on Smith’s point and wish to add that Taylor seems to imply that narrative is the only tool with which to articulate the direction, i.e., oneself in relation to one’s strongly valued good and temporality inherent in this relation. However, it can be argued that, firstly, one does not have to articulate the relationship of oneself to the good when understanding identity. We may still have an implicit assumption of this relation without articulating it. To articulate this relation is only to make this relation more explicit and make our life more meaningful. Secondly, if we need to articulate this relation, we do not have to do it in the form of narrative. If, as Taylor suggests, language, for example, narrative, is just one form of articulation (ibid., p.91-92), and other forms of articulation can also be applied to this relation, for example, music, painting, play and so on, then it would be too generalized to claim that narrative is an inescapable condition for identity. Without narrative as a form of articulation or self-interpretation, self’s sense-making might be inadequate, but not as impossible as it would be without orientation towards the good. In this sense, Taylor exaggerates the role of narrative in terms of ‘inescapability’ in understanding identity. Rather than inescapable, I accept that narrative is suggestive in making sense of identity.

Hence, in my view, narrative is just an important and desirable instrument in understanding identity, particular one dimension of identity, i.e. wholeness of one’s life. However, it should be stressed, in terms of ‘meaning of lives’ as wholeness or unitary lives over one’s lifetime, narrative structure takes a
central role. This is because, only narrative, with its unique temporal feature as a special form of articulation, can help unfold an individual’s ‘maturation and regression’, ‘growth and becoming’ in articulating one’s direction in relation to the good for a meaningful life as a whole. It is also only narrative that makes a coherent connection between small events, occurrences and moral themes possible over a lifetime.

Smith is also not convinced by the view that narrative here must be a ‘quest-type story’, a story of self-discovery in relation to the good. I would consider that in order to understand Taylor’s notion of ‘narrative’, one needs to put it against the background of his moral theory. It can be argued that the form of narrative as quest needs to be understood in Taylor’s discussion about modern persons’ moral frameworks. What Taylor’s thinking about narrative features among different narrative theories is his linkage of narrative to the good, particularly, to the ‘meaning of lives’. ‘Quest’ for a meaning of lives must be understood by linking Taylor’s notion of moral framework and the way the modern person articulates it. Moral frameworks need to be in quest, particular for modern persons who find it difficult to find a satisfactorily acceptable moral framework in the age of pluralism (see, ibid., p.18-19). Taylor argues,

‘...a framework is that in virtue of which we make sense of our lives spiritually. Not to have a framework is to fall into a life which is spiritually senseless. The quest is thus always a quest for sense (ibid., p.18).

According to Taylor, ‘We find sense of life through articulating it’ (ibid.). Abbey interprets this well, ‘These stories might include the discovery of a new good, the recovery of an old one, the sudden or dawning realization of an ongoing one, the need to choose among goods or a period of bewilderment
and loss of orientation’ (Abbey 2000, p.38). Thus, narrative is in quest and is open to critical thinking, rather than in stability or certainty. This is particularly so for modern persons who find it difficult to discover a satisfactorily believable moral framework in the age of pluralism.

4.10 The roles of learning in Taylor’s theory of identity

4.10.1 Articulation and learning

Taylor believes identity is defined by strong evaluations backed by implicit or explicit moral assumptions. He also contends that these implicit moral assumptions can be articulated.

1. Taylor suggests that articulation of implicit moral frameworks can be seen as a way of conducting an examination on one’s lives, which is derived from the Socratic maxim: an unexamined life is not worth living. This reading of articulation thus can be seen as a mode of self-reflection since this kind of articulation clarifies and deepens understanding of moral values by showing what underpins them, thereby enabling the person to acquire a deeper self-knowledge (Abbey 2000, p.41; Taylor 1989a, p.26, p.80, p.92). In this sense, there is a learning process in articulating of one’s implicit moral background through self-interpretation and others’ interpretation. Such kind of learning is a mode of learning about self-knowledge.

2. Taylor also contends that articulation of constitutive good as a moral source can move people towards the good and empower people to live up to that good. This at least suggests that articulating any moral assumption about that which one respects and loves is a mode of learning, since the effect of articulation can empower people to live up that good. Articulating constitutive good can also helps one trace back to find out how he/she acquired such good through his/her dialogue with significant others or social norms. This learning
process can be seen as the discovery of one’s moral sources, which move him/her towards a good life that he/she strongly values.

3. If narrative as self-interpretation is a powerful tool for the articulation of one’s constitutive good as Taylor claims, then the roles of learning analysed above can be found in one’s narrative. Taylor points out that the people who articulate are not necessarily the actors themselves; they can also be others. In this sense, we can see that the role learning relevant to his/her identity can also be found in one’s working on the interpretation, narrative and stories given by others to him/her, not merely from his/her own self-constructed interpretation.

4.10.2 Narrative and learning

1. Narrative as temporal structure

Another role of learning relevant to identity comes from Taylor’s thesis that identity is the result of becoming and growing. According to him, a unitary identity can be presented through an unfolding story about one’s direction towards one’s strongly valued good, from the past, the present towards the future. In one’s narrative construction of the relationship between oneself and the good, and through reflection on this life story, one can acquire a meaningful and unitary sense of his/her life, and his/her identity. This kind of learning can only be carried out through a process of narrating because narrative entails a temporal structure of human experience.

2. Narrative as self-interpretation

Narrative has the capacity of ‘confer meaning and substance to people’s lives’ (Taylor 1989, p.97). This narrative’s capacity is subject to our ability to narrate a story, our power to construct our story. As Taylor points out, ‘... moderns
have become acutely aware of how much sense being there for us depends on our own powers of expression. Discovering here depends on, is interwoven with, inventing. Finding a sense to life depends on framing meaningful expressions which are adequate’ (ibid., p.18). It is here that a certain mode of learning can be found for modern persons to develop their ability to construct narratives that are adequately meaningful. *Increasing one’s power of expression*, especially for many who have problems with the ‘meaning of lives’ in the modern age, can be seen as a central element for narrative in the quest for the meaning of one’s life.

(1) Learning about evaluative language

Given that implicit strong evaluations can be articulated through evaluative language, and given that ‘the language of evaluative distinction’ takes a key role in giving a ‘deep’ articulation about a strong evaluator’s preferences and identity, the role of concerning learning about ‘evaluative language’ is important. As Taylor writes, ‘If I never acquire any evaluative language to talk about something, I can hardly articulate about my alternatives’ (Taylor 1985a, p.25). Laitinen also suggests, ‘Mastering an evaluative language is to have a certain kind of repertoire of “inner life”, a certain kind of sensibility’ (Laitinen 2003, p.33). If Taylor is right in virtue of these points, then acquiring such a ‘language of evaluative distinction’ could be seen as a mode of learning. Any such kind of learning would make the implicit evaluative background of an individual’s moral life owns a more clearer and richer expression and hence deepen his/her understanding of his/her framework of those strong evaluations that define his/her identity. Such learning requires us to acquire a deep grasp of the language and meaning used in that moral framework.
(2) Learning as developing new modes of expression

In Taylor’s theory on ‘Philosophy of Language’ (1985a), he coins a term ‘Expressivism’. This view suggests that changes in the vocabularies of self-understanding change the self and identity that is thereby understood. What we can see here is that a new role of learning can be found in ‘the development of new modes of expression’. Reading a new novel, seeing a new film, experiencing a new event... all can develop new vocabularies of expression of myself, which might change my self-interpretation, and hence change myself, my future experiences and my identity.

Here we can also see an aspect of lifelong learning in this role of learning. In understanding ‘myself’ over ‘my’ life-time, the use of vocabularies and expressions of self-interpretation may change over time due to ‘my’ learning from different experiences in ‘my’ life. This kind of learning helps to ‘develop new modes of expression’. Thus some aspects of my self-identity may change over time as well. Such a mode of learning can only be carried out through the ongoing experiences in our life, in which we enrich our vocabularies about our self-knowledge and increase our capacities to invent more adequate, truthful, self-clairvoyant or even self-deluding expressions. Through such mode of learning, we identify and/or understood different or renewed aspects of ‘self’ and identity.

4.10.3 Reflexivity and role of leaning

If as Taylor says, identity is defined by essential strong evaluations, and if those strong evaluations can be seen as ‘objects’ of self-reflection, we can find some roles of learning concerning identity in this process of reflection. Two modes of reflection related to strong evaluations could be identified. First, reflecting on one’s underlying moral assumptions or the framework of one’s
identity is an attempt to articulate the implicit moral background through the language of evaluative distinctions. In this reflexive process, one can learn how one could respond according to one’s strong evaluation in the face of certain moral issues in daily life.

The second mode of reflection about strong evaluation is radical re-evaluation or ‘radical reflexivity’. Radical re-evaluation has the potential to re-evaluate the existing moral framework underlying certain strong evaluations. Such radical reflexivity has the potential to quit an old evaluative framework, accept a new one or to combine several frameworks in a unique way. Thus, to re-evaluate one’s strong evaluation entails certain modes of reflexive learning.

4.11 Conclusion
Through this lengthy discussion of Taylor’s theory of identity, we can see identity does matter to ourselves. This is only so if we see personal identity is not simply about self-consciousness, as Locke and Parfit considered, and if we see personal identity is also about self-concern. The relationship between identity and the good suggests that personal identity is in a large part a moral concept defined by moral frameworks. These moral frameworks are provided by strong evaluations, without which we will feel disoriented and meaningless in terms of modes of life and kinds of being in human world. The significance of life as a whole could be found in one’s relation to the good over lifetime. The evaluative or moral dimension of personal identity demonstrates the significance of a normative constitution of personal identity. Personal identity in this sense is ‘given’, rather than purely ‘created’ by oneself in an isolated way. Taylor’s theory also suggests that the ‘dialogical self’ takes an irreplaceable role in defining one’s personal identity concerning moral issues, in its dialogue with others, particularly with significant others. This implies
that the definition of personal identity cannot be formulated without ‘others’.

Taylor also stresses the importance of the articulation of moral assumptions underlying personal identity since this mode of articulation makes our constitutive good, i.e., our moral sources, explicit to us and makes us love it and move towards it. Although it is arguable that narrative is an inescapable condition required to make sense of one’s identity in relation to ones’ strongly valued good, it is a desirable temporal structure that may be used to portray this relationship. Some important roles of learning in relation to one’s personal identity emerge in Taylor’s notions of articulation and narrative. We also found two modes of reflections about strong evaluation with rich implications for the roles of learning concerning personal identity.
IDENTITY, LIFELONG LEARNING AND NARRATIVE – A THEORETICAL INVESTIGATION

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(Signature)
...the self does not know itself immediately, but only indirectly by the detour of the cultural signs of all sorts which are articulated on the symbolic mediations which always already articulate action and among them, the narratives of everyday life. Narrative mediation underlines this remarkable characteristic of self-knowledge—that it is self-interpretation.

(Ricoeur 1991, p.198)

Our life, when then embraced in a single glance, appears to us as the field of a constructive activity, borrowed from narrative understanding, by which we attempt to discover and not simply to impose from outside the narrative identity which constitutes us.

(Ricoeur 1991, p.32)

5.1 Introduction

In chapter 3 and chapter 4, I conducted a general investigation into Ricoeur and Taylor’s works respectively on the notion of identity, the notion of narrative and the relation between the two. I have also discovered some roles of learning in their theories. We have seen that one way to understand personal identity is through the notion of narrative identity. But the question of how exactly the notion of narrative can be linked to the notion of identity has not been answered clearly yet. To put it in another way, the central question that needs further discussion is: how should we understand the role(s) of narrative in understanding the notion of identity, or, what contributions can narrative make in understanding identity? I will conduct an analysis of this topic in this chapter. Firstly, based on Ricoeur’s and Taylor’s work, I will
clarify and define how I understand the notion of identity. I will define personal identity mainly from dimensions of a conceptual constitution of this notion and the person’s need for personal identity. Secondly, I will conduct a detailed analysis of the role of narrative in understanding identity in Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories. I will argue that what emerges from my analyses are two categories of roles of narrative in understanding identity, i.e. a category of structural roles and a category of interpretative roles. I will also argue that simply holding either structural analysis or interpretative analysis of narrative, rather than both, will be likely to cause issues in understanding narrative identity. Thirdly, I will discuss the problem of the ‘truthfulness’ of narrative identity in relation to ‘identity’ ‘as it is’ in reality, which is a central issue that might be raised in using the notion of narrative identity. Before doing this, I will discuss the relation between life as narrative and life ‘as it is’ in reality. I conclude that if personal identity is partly constituted by self-interpretation and such self-interpretation as narrative keeps developing and being reflected, it is hard to say there is something like ‘identity as it is’ in reality. Narrative identity as a concept provides us with a strong approach to understand ourselves.

5.2 What is identity?

5.2.1 How can identity be defined?

The use of the term of ‘identity’ at a theoretical level tends to be difficult to define precisely and clearly. By identity, I mean identity of the person, or ‘personal identity’. This term is studied in many fields of humanities and social sciences, such as psychology, sociology and philosophy and so on. So, it is even hard for an expert of a particular area to understand what the term ‘identity’ exactly means beyond his/her particular area. Also, the term identity is quite often qualified by numerous prefixes and is widely used in a radically reified way today. In the field of education, for example, there are terms like
‘teacher identity’, ‘learner identity’ and ‘autistic identity’ and so on, where the concept of identity is merely equated with the term ‘identification’ attached to social roles or status. Thus, the concept of identity is almost equated with numerous specific ‘labels’ referring to appearance, features, types of body, fashion, professional title or personal information and facts used in certain organizations (e.g. bank, club or insurance company).

While the difficulty with the term ‘identity’ might be caused by its multi-disciplinary nature and reified use in a radical way today, it can also be argued that the difficulty with this notion is also a result of misunderstanding of this notion at conceptual level and insufficient understanding of the person’s need for this concept. I wish to define personal identity in these two dimensions.

At a conceptual level, there are some ambiguities in understanding the notion of ‘personal identity’. As I have shown in Chapter 1, the word ‘identity’ can be traced back to its origin in 16th century, meaning ‘the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness’ (OED online 2008). During the seventeenth century this term was applied to ‘person’ and John Locke defines personal identity as sameness with itself in terms of one’s same memory over time and in different places. But the question emanating from that time on is: is a ‘person’ simply like a ‘thing’ to which the notion of sameness can be attached? To put it in other words, is ‘personal identity’ a thing as sameness, or is it a unique existence among others? This issue has puzzled many theorists in defining the term ‘personal identity’ from the age of John Locke until today. Therefore, it is important to examine the term ‘personal identity’ at a conceptual level to deal with this ambiguity, in
order to formulate a clearer definition of personal identity. I will define personal identity at a theoretical level based on my reading of Ricoeur’s work.

It is also necessary to define the notion of personal identity in terms of its importance as a concept, or in terms of answering the question of why we need ‘personal identity’ as a concept. This question cannot have an answer without clear understanding about the question concerning to whom personal identity is important. These questions can be investigated from two approaches of an understanding the notion of personal identity. Firstly, the study of personal identity has been generally focused on the ‘identifications’ and/or ‘labels’ of a person, for example, one’s self-consciousness, membership of an organization, social role, age, gender and class and so on. While these dimensions display some general facts about personal identity from the impersonal view presented by psychological and sociological perspectives, what is excluded is the interpretation of what a person himself/herself says about the importance of being himself/herself in his/her life. Questions about the importance of personal identity are difficult to answer if personal identity is simply defined in terms of impersonal facts and causal events. Secondly, these questions can be articulated if we define personal identity in terms of self-concern and care of others. In defining personal identity, I will focus on self-concern, since to say personal identity matters is basically to say personal identity matters to oneself. But this does not mean that there are no ‘others’ in personal identity. Rather, ‘others’ are constitutive of one’s self-interpretation and self-constancy. I will define the dimension of importance of personal identity based on my reading of both Taylor and Ricoeur’s theories. Before formulating a definition of personal identity based on my understanding of Ricoeur’s and Taylor’s works, we need to revisit these two philosophers’ theories of personal identity.
5.2.2 An examination of the concept of identity

1. Idem-self and ipse-self

Ricoeur contends that by adding two Latin words *idem* (meaning ‘same’) and *ipse* (meaning ‘oneself’) as qualifiers to the self, it is not difficult to see that *idem*-self is self-sameness, i.e. one and the same self; *ipse*-self refers to ‘I myself’, ‘he himself’ or ‘she herself’ i.e., the uniqueness and distinctiveness of a self or the self-uniqueness. As Ricoeur argues,

‘To say self is not to say myself. To be sure, mineness is implied in a certain manner in selfhood, but the passage from selfhood to mineness is marked by the clause “in each case” (in German, je) which Heidegger is careful to add to the positing of mineness. The self, he says, is in each case mine’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.180).

As I have shown in chapter 3, Ricoeur stresses that the differences between *idem* and *ipse* of the self, not only lie in grammatical, epistemological and logical dimensions, but also, more fundamentally, in an ontological sense. The self’s sameness, *idem*, belongs to a mode of being of entities which Heidegger characterizes as *ready-to-hand* and *present-at-hand*. Self’s sameness can be identified or re-identified when based on the substantiality of a substance, or things, both given and manipulable. *Idem*-identity is given, in the sense that one has certain natural properties that are same over time, e.g., sameness of body, gender, ancestral title and character and so on. It is manipulable in the sense that some sameness can be acquired, altered and reconstructed by one’s agency and the radical example could be artificial transformation of one’s body by using technology. But manipulation of *idem*-identity also occurs through social interaction and self’s internalization of otherness, e.g. changes of one’s character.
By contrast, selfhood, *ipseity*, in Ricoeur’s view can be seen as one of the existentials which belongs to the mode of being of *Dasein*. Heidegger characterizes *Dasein* by the capacity to question itself as to its own way of being and thus to relate itself to being *qua* being. What distinguishes *Dasein* from other entities is that in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it. *Ipseity* of the self as a mode of being of *Dasein*, has the capacity to initiate changes to itself. I have also suggested in chapter 3 that *ipseity* or selfhood can be identified through *Self’s Being as care* of the existing Self. Personal identity in this sense is a question of self-concern.

Thus Ricoeur suggests that *idem* and *ipse* are two different beings of the self on an ontological level, i.e., being as substance and being as *Dasein*. In addition to this, Ricoeur stresses that *others* are constitutive of oneself. It is in this sense that self has its ethical dimension, and hence self is the self as care of others, e.g., one needs to respond in the face of ‘others’.

2. **Ricoeur’s view on personal identity**

(1) **What is idem-identity and what is ipse-identity?**

Personal identity is widely considered as ‘sameness’ and ‘continuity’ of the ‘self’. But given differences between *idem*-self and *ipse*-self, personal identity can be seen from different ontological bases and is therefore under two irreducible headings, that is, *idem*-identity (i.e., identity as sameness both in physical sense and in the field of selfhood) and *ipse*-identity (i.e., identity as selfhood, individuality, particularity, distinctiveness and uniqueness of the self). Ricoeur underlines the vital importance of distinguishing these two modes of personal identity.
Besides ontological differences, two modes of identity are also different in terms of one of the underpinnings of the notion identity: permanence in time. With respect to *idem*-identity, one gives a self an ascription of the character defined by certain permanence in time in terms of the *lasting dispositions* of a person. Concerning *ipse*-identity, Ricoeur writes, ‘...identity in the sense of *ipse* implies no assertion concerning some unchangeable core of the personality’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.2). Self’s *ipse*-identity gives self its unique ability to maintain itself and/or initiate something new to itself. Thus *ipse*-identity as self-constancy can be identified as a kind of being as care to that existing self which initiates that action, for example, this act of keeping one’s promise is a kind of fidelity to one’s self, a kind of self-subsistence, which is a kind of self-concern.

But the action constantly given by the *ipse*-self is also ascribable and imputable to that very self as an agent in relation to others over time. For example, the *act of keeping one’s promise to others* includes both an ascription and an imputation emerging from that act. In one sense, this act initiated by a self is identified by others, hence this act is an *ascription* given by others to an agent. In another sense, such act is also an *imputation* given by others to this agent in the sense that this agent has a responsibility to others stemming from one’s relationship to others. That is, such act is based on a person’s assumption that others will *count on* that person because of his/her faithfulness of his/her words, and therefore this person is *accountable for* that act before another (see Ricoeur 1992, p.165). It is in the sense of imputation, that self-constancy expresses an *ethical* dimension. This ethical dimension of the self not only originates from moral responsibility, but also is deeply based on one’s feeling of sympathy to others in intersubjective relations (see ibid., p.192-194).
When analysing the issue of personal identity discussed above, Ricoeur argues that both Locke and Hume’s notion of personal identity are problematic in that they only see personal identity as sameness of the person, i.e., one and the same ‘substance’ of a person over time and in different places. They neglect to recognise that personal identity is also the identity as selfhood, i.e., the identification of self’s unique capacity as a being, which is applied to his/her existing self. Rather than taking the stance of either identity as sameness or identity as selfhood, Ricoeur deals with the problematic of identity by engaging with the space between the two poles of personal identity. Thus, Ricoeur contends that identity should be understood as sense of oneself as ‘self-same’ and this understanding must take the place of the identity understood in the sense of being the same (see Ricoeur 1988, p.246).

(2) Between idem-identity and ipse-identity
As have shown by Ricoeur, personal identity should be understood as two different modes of identity: idem-identity and ipse-identity. But Ricoeur further argues that there is a dialectical relationship between them in terms of permanence in time, where two modes of identity not only accord to each other but also stand apart to each other. The confrontation between idem-identity and ipse-identity becomes a genuine problem when the question of permanence in time appears in two different modes of identity.

Ricoeur maintains that ‘subjectivity is neither an incoherent series of events nor immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.32). For Ricoeur, subjectivity has a dimension of evolution which is a result of interplay between sedimentation and innovation. Sedimentation contains the elements of permanence in time. As I demonstrated in chapter 3, permanence in time in the self presents itself both as self-sameness (i.e. character) and
self-constancy (e.g. keeping one’s word given to others). Between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity, there is a dialectical relationship. Character as *self-same* ‘designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.121).

Ricoeur holds that there are two forms of lasting dispositions. One form of lasting disposition is *habit*, a history of character in which *sedimentation* overlaps *innovation* which preceded it. Innovation is initiated by the *ipse*-self. Sedimentation is an overlapping process of *ipse* by *idem* and hence offers selfhood a type of permanence in time. However, this overlapping does not remove the differences separating *ipse* and *idem*: my character is me, myself, *ipse*; but this *ipse* announces itself as *idem*.

The second form of last disposition is the set of *acquired identifications* by which the *other* enters into the composition of the *self-same*. Ricoeur maintains,

‘the identity of a person or a community is made up of these identifications with values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes, in which the person or the community recognizes itself. This identification is the process of assuming otherness as one’s own by identifying with certain values ‘which makes us place a “cause” above our own survival’ (ibid., p.121).

Here *ipse* and *idem* accord with one another in that both rely on each other. In Ricoeur’s view, the acquisition of the acquired identification is in fact a process of the self’s internalization of something outside of the self (e.g. culture or norms) into something inside of the self over a lifetime. Internalization thus has an aspect of sedimentation, which implies a mode of permanence in time as well.
However, there is another mode of permanence in time in selfhood according to Ricoeur. This is self-constancy. He writes, ‘The perseverance of character is one thing, the perseverance of faithfulness to a word that has been given is something else again. The continuity of character is one thing, the constancy of friendship is quite another’ (ibid. p.123). Ricoeur further maintains that self-constancy presents itself as ‘keeping one’s word in faithfulness to the word that has been given’ (ibid.). No matter what happens to me, ‘I will hold firm’. This is a claim that implies permanence in time supported by an ethical justification. Ipse-identity as a mode of permanence in time, i.e., self-constancy, has no aid or support of the sameness (the idem), but it is underpinned by self-concern (e.g. self-esteem), one’s responsibility and sympathy towards others. Self-constancy has something to do with pure ipse-identity, something metaphysical which cannot be ‘inscribed’ as ‘things’, but supported by certain ontological justification of Being as care to itself and ethical justification with respect to others.

5.2.3 An understanding of the importance of personal identity

To define personal identity in terms of its importance has something to do with two different understandings of personal identity at a conceptual level. That is, it concerns the importance of ‘what am I’ and importance of ‘who am I’. By ‘what am I?’, I mean both neutral facts, e.g. my name, physical features, social class, ethnicity, and beliefs, character, e.g. a Christian. By ‘who am I’, I mean the nature and kinds of being as self-concern, i.e. a self as a being which can answer the question of ‘Where do I stand?’ ‘What is important to me?’. In addition, ‘who am I’ also concerns one’s relation to others, i.e., self as being as care of others.

It can be argued that dimensions of ‘what’ and ‘who’ am I overlap in the
constitution of personal identity. This is, because ‘what am I’ is partly defined or initiated by ‘who am I’ as a kind of being in the world, and ‘who am I’ is partly shaped into of ‘what am I’ over time as character. Both dimensions could be discovered in one’s self-interpretation. Further, the self-interpretation of personal identity is not constructed in isolation, but through one’s dialogue with norms and other subjectivities. Thus, it can be further argued that personal identity has a deeper dimension, concerning the mode and the nature of ‘being’ in the world and one’s relation to others.

What I mean in terms of defining personal identity in respect of the importance of this concept is that one needs this notion to answer the question of ‘who am I’ in terms of my stance in relation to norms, morals and other persons in human world. Without such terms of reference one will feel disoriented, and will not be identified and relied on by others. This way of defining personal identity is based on my reading of Taylor’s theory of moral identity and Ricoeur’s theory of ethical identity, which I have discussed in the proceeding chapters. But to clarify this definition, let us briefly revisit Taylor’s identity theory.

1. Taylor’s view on the self and its relation to personal identity

(1) Self in ‘space of question’ and identity

To understand Taylor’s theory of identity, we need first to have a look at his approach to the self without comprehension of which we would not be able to understand his notion of identity. For Taylor the self as a being exists in a space of self-concerns or ‘a space of questions’. As he writes, ‘We are selves only in that certain issues matter for us’ (Taylor 1989, p.33). ‘The space in questions’ is where the self as an agent or strong evaluator exists to decide questions related to self-concerns. ‘The space in questions’ is mapped by strong
evaluations or qualitative distinctions (see Taylor 1989, p.29). Strong evaluation is acquired by and through the interaction between the self and significant others and the self’s internalisation of the culture and norms. These ‘questions’ can be issues about the qualities of life one evaluates, the kinds of person one wants to be, etc. In this sense, the self as an agent is orientated under the guidance of strong evaluation in the ‘space of questions’ relating to the ‘self as identity’. This is because strong evaluations entail questioning what kind of being I want to be. Thus there is a linkage among the notions of the ‘self’, the ‘strong evaluations’ and the ‘identity’ in Taylor’s work. This linkage can be analysed as following: (1) My identity can be seen as a self-definition defined by the strong evaluations held by the ‘I’ as a strong evaluator who essentially has these convictions. (2) My identity can be seen as a self-identification of my certain properties corresponding to certain strong evaluations that touches the ‘I’ as a strong evaluator, the ‘I’ as an agent in terms of orientation to what kind of person I want to be. As Taylor writes, ‘To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary’ (Taylor 1989, p.28). Therefore, Taylor maintains that ‘[o]ur identity is defined by our fundamental (strong) evaluations’ (Taylor 1985a, p.34). Thus it could be argued that the heart of Taylor’s theory of identity is about what is important to a self as being and/or person. As he claims, ‘Our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not’ (Taylor 1989, p.30). Hence, the need of personal identity for a person in Taylor’s theory is not difficult to understand from here.

The importance of Taylor’s notion of identity reveals that identity is tightly linked with his notion of human agent. Strong evaluation according to Taylor is
an essential condition of being a person, because shorn of it,

‘we would lose the very possibility of being an agent who evaluates; that our existences as persons, and hence our ability to adhere as persons to certain evaluations, would be impossible outside the horizon of these essential evaluations, that we would break down as persons, be incapable of being persons in the full sense’ (ibid., p.34-35).

Hence it is not surprise why Taylor maintains that ‘our identity is therefore defined by certain evaluations which are inseparable from ourselves as agents’ (Taylor 1985a, p.34).

(2) Self-concept and identity in human history

The self in ‘the space of questions’ is, for Taylor has historical dimension and is a result of social interaction. The self has a historical dimension because self-understanding in different historical ages has different meanings. The idea that one has a self, that we can talk about selfhood as some phenomenon is, as Taylor proposes, a modern development. As he puts it, ‘…certain developments in our self-understanding are a precondition of putting the issue in terms of identity’ (Taylor 1989, p.28). This view also applies to the notion of identity. As he writes, ‘Talk about “identity” in the modern sense would have been incomprehensible to our forebears of a couple of centuries ago’ (ibid.). This at the very least suggests that we cannot see the concept of identity as a non-historical notion and should not resolve questions of moral identity/orientation in universal terms.

(3) Self in the ‘web of interlocution’ and identity

Another crucial feature of Taylor’s notion of the self is that ‘one is a self only among other selves’ (ibid., p.35). He maintains, ‘The genesis of the human
mind is in this sense not monological, not something each person accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical’ (Taylor 1995b, p.230). This position, as Taylor mentioned, accords with Mead’s suggestion of the notion of the self, which is originated from intersubjectivity. Mead suggests that the meaning of ‘reflective consciousness’, including ‘self-consciousness’ and ‘conscious reflection’ occasions in ‘social interaction’ and has an ‘intersubjective’ origin (see Biesta 1998). Taylor therefore calls this notion of the self as a ‘dialogical self’, which exists in ‘the web of interlocution’. He further maintains that we define our identity through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression through exchanges with others. Language here is used in a broad sense, meaning not only words we speak, but also ‘language’ of art, of gesture, of age, of a community, of a tradition, of a culture and the like. These languages of expression are also the languages of strong evaluation which enable us become full human agents, understand ourselves, define and discover our identity. In this sense, Taylor’s conception of identity is partly based on Mead’s view that the meaning of symbols and actions, e.g., language and gestures, has its origin in certain intersubjective conditions and certain social situations. Thus Taylor holds that ‘…to be able to answer for oneself (the question of who he/she is) is to know where one stands, what one wants to answer’ (Taylor 1989, p.29, emph. added).

2. Taylor’s view on identity and self-interpretation

According to Taylor, the ‘identity’ identified through ‘others’ by oneself in social interactions does not mean this identification constitutes all dimensions of one’s identity. It can be argued that Taylor’s notion of identity does not merely follow a social or psychological view of the self, i.e. focus on self-consciousness and/or self-identification. Rather he goes beyond this tradition. For example, Taylor goes further than Erving Goffman, whose
notions of a person’s ‘social identity’ and ‘personal identity’ are fundamentally ‘frameworks of identification’ in the ‘eyes’ of others, though Goffman suggests that individual can also gain a sense of ‘self-image’ through reflection based on the reactions of the others’ attitudes (see Goffman 1963). For Taylor, whether those personal/social features (i.e. features reflected back from others to ‘me’) will be part of my identity still depends on whether I accept these features as important qualities for me or not. That is, my acceptance of those features as part of my identity depends on my self-concern in relation to those features. According to Taylor, this is where self-interpretation is required. In another word, identity is also about an ‘I’ who cares, asks questions and decides ‘the meaning’ that this identity has for ‘me’.

Although Taylor’s notion of identity seems to be normative and ‘given’, i.e., coming from outside of the ‘self’, he emphasises that it is still ‘up to’ an individual to decide what kind of being he is going to be (see Taylor 1976, p.281). This suggests that one’s identity is inseparable from a ‘subjective’ eye that one uses to see and evaluate him/herself. Hence, Taylor’s notion of self-identity should not simply be understood in an interactive dimension in sociological tradition, but also needs to be understood further in a ‘subjective’ manner. In this sense, the nature of Taylor’s notion of identity is similar to psychologist Erikson’s notion of ‘ego identity’. According to Erikson the latter has a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, which is paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image (see Erikson 1970). However, Taylor’s notion of a ‘subjective’ element in identity seems to have a wider socio-historical background and deeper cultural foundation than what Erikson means by a ‘subjective’ element. Taylor argues against the position that the self as an ‘object’ could be understood in neutral and objective sense, a position which is
taken for granted in mainstream psychological and sociological fields. Rather, Taylor holds that there is always a certain mode of *Self-concern*. ‘What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me (Taylor 1989, p.34). He further claims that the self is partly constituted by its self-interpretation (Taylor 1985a, 1989, p.34). ‘…our interpretation of ourselves and our experience is constitutive of what we are’ (ibid., p.47). Because of certain modes of ‘self-concern’, self-interpretation is a vital component of an identity, one that cannot be neglected. In order to understand and explain ourselves and our identities, we must include those self-interpretations. Hence, Taylor claims, ‘To ask what a person is, in abstraction form his or her self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn’t in principle be an answer’ (Taylor 1989, p.34).

In sum, personal identity is not ‘out there’ in reality, or simply in the ‘eyes’ of others, and simply discovered by oneself, nor is it a pure subjective sense of the self without the influences of social interaction. Rather personal identity is partly constituted by and through interplay between the self, norms and others, but it only makes sense to an individual through his/her self-interpretation of who he/she is.

### 5.2.4 A synthetic understanding of the notion of personal identity

I hope that the above discussion will help me clarify my synthetic understanding of term ‘identity’, or more precisely, ‘personal identity’. I would like to present and discuss six salient common features shared by Ricoeur and Taylor in their theories of identity.
(1) Personal identity cannot be seen as simply ‘things’ out there from which a person can be identified and re-identified. Personal identity also concerns the identification of the Being as Care of oneself and others. According to Ricoeur, while idem-identity is about the sameness of substantiality of substance of a person, his notion ipse-identity is concerned with the identification of a kind of being of Dasein as self-concern and a kind of being as care of others. Taylor suggests that we cannot simply read ‘personal identity’ as an ‘object’ of self-consciousness. Rather, personal identity is also about self-concern constituted by self-interpretation along with strong evaluations that decide what kind of being one wants to be.

(2) Personal identity cannot be understood without an understanding of agency. For Ricoeur, personal identity is based on self as an agent in terms of ascription of action to an agent (as author) and imputation of action to an agent (as patient). For Taylor, identity is closely linked with one’s agency because identity is partly constituted by strong evaluations, which are inseparable from human agents as strong evaluators.

(3) The concept of identity is inseparable from the notion of time. Ricoeur maintains that permanence in time is a defining principle of personal identity. Both Ricoeur and Taylor assert that the sense or meaning of one’s identity is developed through life history, i.e., the meaning of one’s life and the wholeness of one’s life are partly made by linking one’s past, present and future of personal life into a thematic and temporal whole.

(4) Personal identity is shaped by cultural and norms. The heart of personal identity, the ‘self’, is multi-faceted. The self is not merely a psychological notion like something internal, i.e., ego. The self is socialized by others and internalises cultures and norms, by and through social interaction. For Ricoeur, the self of self-knowledge is instructed by culture. Taylor suggests our identity is defined by fundamental evaluation that is shaped by culture. The concept of
the self has a historical development evolved through human history, so does the concept of identity.

(5) Personal identity cannot be constituted without others. As Ricoeur argues, ipse-identity as self-constancy expresses one’s responsibility to others. According to Taylor, ‘significant others’ take an essential role in one’s construction and definition of his/her personal identity.

(6) Personal identity is not stable and without changes, instead, it is developing and changing. Ricoeur shows us that identity is not stagnant, but is dynamic and has many dialectical dimensions. Human subjectivity has a dimension of evolution in the interaction between sedimentation and innovation received from the self’s experiences in the world. According to Taylor, identity is ‘growing’, ‘becoming’ in relation to certain ‘good’ and is constructed in one’s quest for meaning in the age of pluralism.

There are however, at least two major different but complementary points between Ricoeur’s and Taylor’s views about understanding identity. Firstly, Ricoeur focuses on the conceptual analysis of the notion of personal identity, but Taylor focused on ‘significance’ and ‘need’ for identity. Ricoeur distinguishes between idem-identity (sameness) and ipse-identity (identity as selfhood). Taylor’s notion of moral identity can be classified into what Ricoeur calls acquired identification as ‘character’. But rather than conducting a conceptual analysis of differences between ipse- and idem-identity, Taylor focuses on the clarification of the ipse dimension of character and sees it from its ‘meanings’, ‘features’ and their qualitative aspects. In Taylor’s view identity is concerned with the meanings and importance that things have for ourselves. Ricoeur, however, does not focus too much on this aspect.
Secondly, in Taylor’s notion of moral identity, ‘others’ mainly appear at an epistemological level, but do not appear at an ontological level. In other words, the dimension of being which is responsible for ‘others’, is not stressed as being a constitutive element in the constitution of personal identity in Taylor’s theory. But in Ricoeur’s theory, responsibility to ‘others’, is the central factor in the constitution of *ipse*-identity as self-constancy. While Ricoeur agrees with Taylor’s thesis in that ‘what is important to me’ as my identity is partly defined by my self-concern, he particularly stresses that personal identity as self-constancy implies a kind of self’s care of others. According to Ricoeur, personal identity at an ethical level is embodied as responsibility to others.

5.2.5 Defining personal identity

Based on my discussion above, I would like to define personal identity as following:

(1) Personal identity is a theoretical construct that belongs to both the category of the ‘thing’ and the category of the ‘being’. In the sense of the ‘thing’, it can be seen as identity as sameness; in the sense of ‘being’, it can be understood as identity as selfhood.

(2) Personal identity cannot be merely understood as impersonal descriptions of facts or events, nor can it be simply understood as self-consciousness. Personal identity must also be defined in terms of self-interpretation underpinned by *care*, both as self-concern and as care of others. This definition is central in answering the question of why we need the concept of personal identity.

(3) Otherness, including moral norms and other persons, is constitutive of the notion of personal identity.

(4) The articulation of personal identity needs to be linked with a temporal dimension.
(5) Personal identity is discovered and constructed by the self in its ongoing cyclical activity formed from both outside in and inside out of one’s ‘self’.

5.3 Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor on the role of narrative in understanding identity

The narrative conception of identity has become one of the central concerns about identity theories in the second half of the last century (e.g., Arendt 1958, MacIntyre 1985, Taylor 1988, 1989, Ricoeur 1984, 1988, 1992, Giddens 1991). The term narrative identity can be generally understood as identity constructed and presented in the form of a narrative, e.g. life story, biography or autobiography. What I will do next is conduct an analysis of the role of narrative in understanding identity. I will focus on the work of Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor. This is firstly because both philosophers gave insightful and systematic arguments about identity and narrative. Secondly, both philosophers appear to complement each other in terms of their theories as well as in their analytical approaches. Finally, recognition of the two philosophers’ differences in their theories might produce a further analysis of narrative.

Such an analysis has the potential to make contributions in various ways. It can bring unknown elements of narrative into light in terms of understanding identity, so as to deepen and widen our understanding of the notion of identity. This analysis might even provide grounds for finding out educative elements in narrative. Methodologically, such analysis can be seen as an endeavour to bridge the gap between narrative in humanities and narrative in social science.
Through this analysis, I also hope to examine Ricoeur and Taylor’s differences for further discussion and critical thinking. I hope that this comparative analysis of the role of narrative in understanding identity might produce a complementary understanding of the role of narrative in making sense of identity.

5.3.1 Paul Ricoeur’s view on the role of narrative in understanding identity

Ricoeur’s theory of narrative is a result of his study of the relationship between time and narrative. He conducted a sophisticated structural analysis of narrative by linking narrative to the notion of time and puts forward the notion of Threefold Mimesis. Mimesis means the imitation or representation of action. Between three moments of mimesis, i.e. mimesis 1 (prefiguration), mimesis 2 (configuration) and mimesis 3 (refiguration), mimesis 2 is the pivot of the analysis, in which emplotment mediates between mimesis 1 and mimesis 2. Mimesis 1 is concerned with preunderstandings of ‘the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character’ (Ricoeur 1984, p.54). Mimesis 3 is about the act of reading as ‘the intersection of the world of the text and world of the hearer or reader’ (ibid., p71). While mimesis 1 is configured through mimesis 2 into mimesis 3, the reader’s response to the text (mimesis 3) is also configured through mimesis 2 into mimesis 1 as the new part of preunderstanding in the lived world, and thus a hermeneutic circle is completed. In analysing the concept of personal identity, Ricoeur mainly uses mimesis 2 to deal with the problematic of identity. His structural analysis of narrative confers strong mediating/ordering functions and temporal elements on narrative and the notion of narrative identity. The heart of Ricoeur’s argument is that narrative essentially performs a mediating role in many dialectical dimensions in understanding identity. The following are some salient dialectical dimensions
in understanding identity. In each dialectical pair, narrative takes a mediating role.


Ricoeur maintains that narrative is the mediating ‘factor’ between ipse identity and idem identity. As I have discussed in chapter 3, Ricoeur not only distinguishes between ipse-identity and idem-identity, but also articulates a dialectical relationship between the two in selfhood. Narrative for Ricoeur is exactly an ideal form of mediation in this dialectical relation in understanding the notion of personal identity. Firstly, in the stable pole where ipse-identity is overlapped by idem-identity, it is exactly narrative that deploys the character contracted by sedimentation. ‘What sedimentation has contracted narration can re-deploy’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.122). Secondly, more importantly, in Ricoeur’s mind, it is in the dialectical relation between the pole of character and the pole of self-constancy that the intervention of narrative identity as a form of mediation is suggested (see ibid., p.123). As has been shown in chapter 3, narrative identity takes the role of mediator between permanence in time in self-sameness and permanence in time in self-constancy. Narrative identity in this sense is a poetic response to the conceptual paradox of personal identity.

2. **Between history and fiction (Ricoeur 1988, p.246-248; 1992, p.114)**

Narrative helps us understand practical identity in answering the question like ‘Who did this?’ ‘Who is the agent, the author?’ Here, Ricoeur agrees with Hannah Arendt that ‘to answer these questions of “who?” is not merely to give the name(s), it is also to tell the story of life’ (Ricoeur 1988, p.246). Ricoeur writes, ‘The story told tells about the action of the “who.” And the identity of this “who” therefore itself must be a narrative identity’ (ibid.). This is because
this ‘action of “who”’, throughout either in personal life or community life, can only appear to us through the presentation of a life history/story. Life story as narrative occupies the place in the dialectic between historical narrative and fictional narrative. According to Ricoeur, there are two classes of narrative: history and fiction. For Ricoeur, between historical narrative and fiction narrative there is a dialectic relation. They are different in that it is generally considered that history tells facts, but fiction is widely considered as something imagined. However, Ricoeur holds that people and nations in historical writing behave as if they were characters in a fiction (which is quasi-fictional in his term), just as characters in fiction behave as if they were real people. The past of fiction is depicted as if it were the real past that history depicts (which is quasi-historical in his term). Narrative of personal identity and/or community identity is ‘borrowed’ from the ‘the criss-crossing processes of a fictionalization of history and a historization of fiction’ (Ricoeur 1988, p. 246). This is why Ricoeur calls narrative identity as a structure of human experience that exists somewhere between historical narrative and fictional narrative. As he writes, ‘The fragile offshoot issuing from the union of history and fiction is the assignment to an individual or a community of a specific identity that we can call their narrative identity’ (ibid.).

3. Between time as passage and time as duration (Ricoeur 1984, p.66-67; 1988, p.244; 1991, p.20-33)

The time in narrative is the ‘narrative time’ that mediates between episodic aspect of time and configuration aspect of time (Ricoeur 1984, p.67). Ricoeur argues that philosophers see the notion of time at least in two different perspectives: time as passage in reality or universe (or cosmological time), e.g., clock time, and time as what we experienced as the duration of the past, the present and the future by an individual mind or consciousness (or
phenomenological time). Ricoeur argues that the latter can never replace the former and that there is no pure phenomenological time. After arguing the theories of time proposed by Aristotle versus Augustine, by Husserl versus Kant and by Heidegger versus the ‘Ordinary’ concept of time, Ricoeur concludes that there is a mutual occlusion between these two perspectives of time. However, both notions of time also imply each other, thus he calls this predicament as an ‘aporia of time’ (see Ricoeur 1988).

Ricoeur then argues that narrative can be a poetical response to this ‘aporia of time’. Narrated time is like a bridge set over the breach speculation constantly opens between two perspectives of time (Ricoeur 1988, p.244). There are two sorts of time in every story told which correspond to cosmological time and phenomenological time respectively. One is the time that passes and flows away in linear manner. The other is the time that endures and remains in human consciousness. The former sort of time is made up of discrete points in linear succession that is open and theoretically indefinite; the latter is characterized by integration, culmination and closure owing to which ‘the story receives a particular configuration’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.22). The former dimension of time constitutes the episodic dimensions of narrative that is made up of separate events. The latter dimension of time is concerned with the configurational dimensions of narrative (mimesis 2) in which a plot composes events into a story. In this dimension, an act of what Ricoeur calls ‘grasping together’ (Ricoeur 1984, p.66) draws ‘the unity of one temporal whole’ (ibid.) or ‘temporal totality’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.22) from a succession of time that entails separate events or episodes. Ricoeur also maintains that story has its ‘followability’, i.e., the story’s capacity to be followed under the guidance of an expectation that finds its fulfilment in the ‘conclusion’ (Ricoeur 1984, p.66). Ricoeur then argues that the story’s followability transforms the paradox of
distension (time as passage) and intention (time as duration) into ‘a living dialectic’. On the one hand, the episodic dimension of narrative draws narrative time in the direction of the linear representation of time; on the other hand, the configurational dimension of narrative reveals temporal features in a way that is opposite to those of the episodic dimension. Ricoeur argues that in the configurational act the whole plot can be translated into one ‘thought’, ‘point’ or ‘theme’ which is not atemporal. The time of the theme of the story is the ‘narrative time’ that ‘mediates between the episodic aspect and configuration aspect’.

4. Between concordance and discordance

(1) Between multiple events/incidents and unified/complete story (Ricoeur 1984, p.66; 1991, p.20-33)

Emplotment unifies multiple elements that appear to be different. Emplotment (mimesis 2) is what makes a story intelligible. Emplotment, under the aegis of what Ricoeur calls narrative intelligence or narrative understanding (Ricoeur 1984, p.65), is the ability to grasp multiple events and different episodes which are discordant and tie them together into an intelligible and complete story, permitting a concordant readability (thought) to our lives. This is one dimension of what Ricoeur calls ‘discordant concordance’, which is mediated by configuration.

(2) Between heterogeneous factors and a single story (Ricoeur 1984, p.66; 1991, p.20-33, 1992, p.141-142)

By ‘concordance’, Ricoeur means ‘the principle of order that presides over what Aristotle calls “the arrangement of facts” ’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.141). By referring to Aristotle’s theory in *Poetics* on Tragedy, Ricoeur shows that the plot comes first before the characters. The thought (dianoia), or the theme, which goes with the
plot, guided by followability, constitutes the ‘what’ imitated by the action. By ‘discordances’, he means ‘the reversals of fortune that make the plot an ordered transformation from an initial situation to a terminal situation’ (ibid.), that is, heterogeneous components like agents, goals, means, interactions, unintended circumstances, discoveries, chances or planned encounters and unexpected results etc (see also Ricoeur 1984, p.65; 1991, p.20-33). In this sense, the gathering together of all these factors into a single story is both concordant and discordant at once. Again, Ricoeur applies the notion ‘configuration’ in narrative to emplotment (mimesis 2), which mediates between concordance and discordance, making a ‘synthesis of heterogeneous ‘elements (see Ricoeur 1992, p.141).

5. Between lived and told

(1) Emplotment (mimesis 2) in narrative mediates between the story that is told and the action (Ricoeur 1992, p.143).

The identity of character in narrative is comprehensible only through the transfer of the operation of emplotment, which is firstly used to arrange the real action recounted, to the character. So, character is subordinated to the emplotment. In constructing the identity of the story told firstly, the narrative constructs the identity of the character, (or the narrative conception of the identity, or narrative identity). As Ricoeur writes, ‘It is indeed in the story recounted, with its qualities of unity, internal structure, and completeness which are conferred by emplotment, that the characters preserves throughout the story an identity correlative to that of the story itself’ (ibid. p. 143).

(2) Refiguration (mimesis 3) of narrative mediates between the world of text and the world of reader (Ricoeur 1984, p.70-82; 1991, p.20-31; 1992, p.163).
Ricoeur maintains that it is the refiguration in the hearer or the reader that the narrative reaches its fulfilment. Refiguration is an intersection of the world configured by the plots and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality. Firstly, the act of reading does not only mean the entry of the work into the field of *communication*, but also at the same time, it means the entry into the field of *reference* (Ricoeur 1984, p.77). Reference is a type of ‘application’ of the world of narrative text to reality. The recounted past is the interweaving of factual reference and imaginative reference, that is, it is a *quasi-past*, in which the narrated past involves a projection of the future (see Ricoeur 1992, p.163). Refiguration helps us look at our future in reading our past. Secondly, in responding to the criticism from structuralist views that narrative has a *closure*, but life is not completed until death, Ricoeur argues that narrative is open-ended. He argues that the narrative of a life needs refiguration, that is, examined reading, in order for it to be understood. In the same way, it is the scrutiny of the life that gives person’s life a closure, *not* death. If the closure of a life is not completed by examination, then narrative closure is not fulfilled by the act of reading, because it is possible that new reading may always confer new meanings on narrative. This suggests that despite the fact that Ricoeur mainly employs a structural analysis of narrative in studying the notion of identity, he does not underestimate the interpretative dimension of narrative. In fact, he uses the Hermeneutic tradition to clarify narrative identity. He asserts, ‘self-understanding is an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among others signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.114n). This suggests that the self of ‘self-knowledge’ in Ricoeur’s mind is a self which is instructed by cultural symbols. Narrative, either historical or fictional, is conveyed by culture (see also Ricoeur 1989, p.245).
5.3.2 Charles Taylor’s view on the role of narrative in understanding identity

Like Ricoeur, Taylor believes that the question of identity is inseparable from self-interpretation. As he writes, ‘To ask what a person is, in abstraction from his or her self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn’t in principle be an answer’ (Taylor 1989, p.34).

Self-interpretation requires language and language is gained through social interaction and internalization. Taylor’s theory of narrative in relation to identity is also linked with his assumption that the institution of meaning in language and narrative is bound up with our being as ‘human’ in everyday life, our moral framework, or our background of strong evaluation. The moral language of strong evaluation is the result of interaction in daily life and internalization of culture and norms. So, narrative in this understanding is embedded in the certain cultural and historical assumptions and hence provides a background for self-interpretation. Furthermore, this understanding of narrative demonstrates a dialogical/argumentative dimension between oneself and others, between different self-interpretations, cultures, histories, values, etc.

Taylor’s full definition of someone’s identity involves both a moral perspective and reference to a defining social community (Taylor 1989, p.36). He basically confers roles of articulating, unity-constructing, meaning-making and conflict-resolving on narrative in understanding identity.


Based on his theory of ‘strong evaluation’, Taylor maintains that strong evaluations are constitutive of identity. As Taylor writes, ‘Our identity is defined by our fundamental evaluations’ (Taylor 1985a, p.34). Strong
evaluations are acquired through internalization and they provide individuals with an orientation towards their ‘strongly valued good’. In other words, Taylor’s notion of identity is tightly linked with the notion of human agency as such orientation. As he writes, strong evaluations are ‘certain evaluations which are inseparable from ourselves as agents’ (ibid.).

According to Taylor, strong evaluations are implicit or explicit assumptions concerning our moral backgrounds. ‘Moral’ here is beyond the normal use in the sense of duty and obligation. In Taylor’s mind ‘moral’ concerns the broad view about ‘what makes life worth living’ which involves ‘strong evaluation’ (Taylor 1989, p.4). Making the implicit moral background of strong evaluations explicit through articulation, can be seen as examining one’s moral values by reflecting what underpins them. In this process, one can gain a deeper understanding of one’s of self-identification and self-definition. Also, articulation can bring us to the goods as moral sources and moral sources empower people to love and respect those goods. This respect and love can better enable people to live up to those goods. In this sense, narrative can empower people to confirm and love the convictions conveyed implicitly in their moral identity and live up to them. Narrative as a key form of articulation, Taylor asserts, acts as one of the conditions of moral identity (ibid., p.51-52).

2. A structure to provide a ‘thematic unit’ of life and identity. (Taylor 1989, p.34, p.49-51, 528)

Taylor’s notion of identity, which is largely defined by moral frameworks, corresponds to his notion of the self that exists in ‘moral space’. For Taylor, the identity of a self is not merely the sameness of human organism, identity of a self also has something to do with the ‘care’, the ‘self-concern’ of every human being her/himself. As Taylor argues, what is concerned, for ‘a self as being
who exists in the space of concerns’ (Taylor 1989, p.51), is basically the unity of my life, that is, the continuity between the past, the present, and the future in my life as a whole. ‘What is in question is, generally and characteristically, the shape of my life as a whole’ (ibid., p.50). My narrative with my language of strong evaluation has the capacity to portray my ‘concern’ about myself, or what matters to me, and make my life a meaningful whole, a thematic unity, hence a coherent personal identity in moral dimension.

3. A tool to arrange multiple events and a plurality of goods over lifetime into a single life story. (Taylor 1989, 47-52)

(1) Narrative is an unfolding story or a history of oneself’s contact with ‘strong valued good(s)’. In order to make sense of our identity in relation to such goods, we must not only answer questions about orientation, but also questions about the direction of our lives. However, the directions of lives, that is, the moving towards or away from the good/goals, is not only found in a moral space, but also presented over human lifetime. In other words, in my contact with the ‘goods’, there is a history of failures and successes, ups and downs, moving away or toward the ‘goods’ or ‘worth’ of my life (Taylor 1989, p.47). Not only my history of how I have become as what I am, but also the future about what I am going to be, needs to be understood in an ‘unfolding story’ (see ibid.). As Taylor writes, ‘[I]n order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going’ (ibid.). Here we can see that the ‘direction of lives’ has inherently a temporal dimension. That is, we cannot give meaning to our present place related to the valued good without locating it in the temporal context of our lives, both the past events and future projects. Thus, Taylor concludes, ‘My self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative’ (ibid., p.50).
(2) Narrative also brings plurality of goods, both in a diachronous heterogeneity and synchronous heterogeneity, into a single unity. As Laitinen explains, ‘Narrativity can bring concordance to both synchronous and diachronous discordances, through combining a plurality of goods within a single life and through reasoning in transitions’ (see Laitinen 2002). Individuals not only balance different goods, but also hold new ones and discard old ones as well as avoid others. Diachronously, there might be a diversity of goods over one’s life time. Narrative can help him/her make sense of the transitions and even make radical changes in one’s moral outlook through their expression in practical reasoning. More importantly, being confronted with a plurality of goods at a certain time for an individual can be seen as a synchronous heterogeneity. According to Laitinen’s interpretation, ‘one way of unifying different goods is to assign them different places and times in one’s life’ (ibid.). Thus, disparate goods can be combined into a unity. As Abbey proposes, narrative doesn’t have to be relentlessly linear; it can be a story about change, twists and turns both in diachronic and synchronic ways (see Abbey 2000).


Taylor believes that the meaning of lives is defined by moral frameworks, particularly in ancient time. However he claims that ‘frameworks today are problematic’ (Taylor 1989, p.17). Taylor argues that among modern people, some people might stick to a traditionally defined framework and reject other views. Others might hold pluralist views and loosely bind on these views. Still others are seekers in ‘quest’ of meaning due to their own awareness of uncertainties of modernity or personal inadequacies. For seekers, meaning of lives cannot simply be understood as the gamut of traditionally available
frameworks. For them, the meaning of lives is a complex issue. As he writes,

‘Not only do they embrace these traditions tentatively, but they also often develop their own versions of them, or idiosyncratic combinations of or borrowings from or semi-inventions within them. And this provides the context within which the question of meaning has its place’ (Taylor 1989, p.17, emph. added).

Taylor believes that the version of ‘seekers’ is dominant in our age (ibid., p.18-19). Meaning of lives nowadays therefore seems to be a product of interweaving between moral frameworks and personal capacities. The failure of having this product might result from ‘personal inadequacy’ or ‘come from there being no ultimately believable framework’ (ibid., p.17) and leads to ‘a life which is spiritually senseless’ (ibid., p.18), or suffers from a sense of meaningless, emptiness or homelessness. The seeking of meaning of lives equates with a quest for a sense of spiritual fullness and unity and/or moral significance. So, Taylor writes, ‘[W]e find the sense of life through articulating it’ (ibid.). But he adds, ‘…modern have become acutely aware of how much sense being there for us depends on our own powers of expression’ (ibid.).

In this respect, Taylor claims that people can attain meaning of life (from existed frameworks) through articulation in the first sense, and when they do it, they create meaning depending on their ability to articulate it. In the first sense, narrative as a form of articulation is suggested. But it is in his thoughts about the latter sense of meaning-creating, that he stresses his theory of ‘expressivism’ and this seems to be another key reason why narrative is significant in understanding identity. According to Taylor’s theory on linguistic articulation, ‘our formulation about ourselves can alter what they are about’ (see Taylor 1985a, p.101; cf.35-8, 191; 1985b, p.26-7). Changes in vocabularies of self-understanding of experiences, emotions and motivations,
change the self that is thereby understood. Taylor coins the term ‘expressivism’ to propose that ‘the development of new modes of expression enables us to have new feeling, more powerful or more refined, and certainly more self-aware. In being able to express our feelings, we give them a reflective dimension which transforms them’ (1985a: 233; cf. 1995a, p.92, 97-98 cited in Abbey 2000, p.61). Here, what we can see is an important role that narrative plays in understanding identity.

But why and in what way can self-interpretation be different? Taylor argues, what an individual articulates ‘is not an independent object with a fixed degree and manner of evidence’ (Taylor 1985a, p.38), rather it is implicit or inarticulate sense of what is decisive importance, i.e. implicit strong evaluation. A new articulation of this ‘object’ tends to make it something different from what it was before. This is because, in a new articulation, ‘there are more or less adequate, more or less truthful, more self-clairvoyant, or self-deluding interpretations’ (ibid.). This can answer the question of why narrative can be seen as a structure of meaning-making and remaking of personal identity. If one uses different or new modes of expression and vocabularies in narrative, then narrative as a linguistic form of articulation in the sense of ‘expressivism’ could be seen as an ongoing process of self-reflective making and re-making of the meaning of one’s life and one’s identity.

5. A place of arguments to show ‘biographical transition’
According to Taylor, narrative has an argumentative dimension, particularly when displaying one’s ‘biographical transition’. Narrative shows, not merely tells (see Steele 2003, p.429; Taylor 1995a, p.221). Taylor stresses the biographical nature of practical reason as a transitional argument, which he calls ‘biographical transition’ (Taylor 1995a, p.224). In Taylor’s view, narrative is not
merely about story ‘telling’, it is also about ‘showing’ the transition from one moral ‘position’ to another one. One is confident that position Y is superior to his/her former position X through making a comparison between both self-readings, because he/she knows that he/she passed from one to the other via an ‘error-reducing move’, for example, an identification of contradiction, a clarification of a confusion and a realization of a neglected belief which is significant to him/her. He/she accepted Y and it brings about the self-justifying transition (see ibid.). This ‘error-reducing move’ is an epistemic gain (see ibid., p.225).

The argumentative dimension of narrative can also be seen as a comparison between one’s self-interpretation and other interlocutors’ interpretations. Because the narrator compares different interpretations (readings) about one’s life and oneself (both implicit and explicitly), narrative in this sense can be seen as a comparative argument. Narrative as an account of comparison between different self-interpretations (transitional argument) shows/makes sense of ‘biographical transition’, which is comes about through one’s practical reasoning. Narrative thus can be seen as a key form of transitional argument (esp. biographical transition) in the form of practical reasoning.

5.4 The emergence of two categories of roles of narrative in understanding identity

Over the landscape of narrative studies, it can be observed that there are at least two dominant analytical approaches to narrative. The first approach of analysis puts emphasis on the structural analysis of narrative (e.g. Kermode 1966, Barthes 1966, Chatman 1978, Ricoeur 1984, 1985, 1988, Carr 1986, 1991). This approach focuses on narrative as a linguistic, temporal and experiential structure in relation to action of an individual. It examines how narrative as a
structure arranges, organizes and deploys different events, actions, occurrences and temporal elements into a coherent unity, e.g. a unity with a beginning-middle-end structure. The second approach to analysis stresses interpretative analysis of narrative (e.g. Taylor 1989; Ricoeur 1991, Bruner 2004). This approach pays special attentions to narrative as a media or symbol that conveys or produces meaning. It examines how narrative can carry out and formulate self-interpretation and meaning embedded in culture, norms, morality, values, history and tradition of certain human contexts. However, these two approaches to narrative do not stand apart in total separation; they overlap in some aspects. This overlapping can be seen in either Ricoeur’s work or Taylor’s work. What emerges from preceding analyses is that these two approaches to narrative bring into formation two categories of roles of narrative in understanding identity: the category of structural roles and the category of interpretative roles. However, the two categories also overlap since structural analysis and interpretative analysis are interconnected in many aspects of narrative.

Despite of the differences between these two philosophers’ theories, we can draw from them some essential roles of narrative in understanding identity which can be classified in these two categories. What I present below are just some salient roles that narrative takes in understanding identity. These roles either belong to a structural category or belong to an interpretative category, and some roles span both categories since the two categories overlap each other. This is not only because of Ricoeur’s and Taylor’s different focuses on the notion of personal identity, but also because they share certain common ground in their theories.

5.4.1. Category of structural roles of narrative in understanding identity
1. Narrative as temporal structure

Both Ricoeur and Taylor have shown the importance of the temporal nature of narrative in understanding identity. They maintain that narrative identity not only recounts an individual’s ‘past’, but also implies one’s ‘future’. Both agree that narrative recounts care of one’s life as a whole (Taylor 1989, p.38, 59, 238; Ricoeur 1992, p.136, 163). Based on his metaphor, Taylor maintains that any humans’ direction in relation to the goods in ‘moral space’ inherently involves a temporal dimension (Taylor 1989, p.50). Narrative as a life story is essential in the way that it gives the meaning of life as a whole, with an interweaving of the past, the present and the future over one’s lifetime. Narrative according to Taylor is necessary in order to recount an individual’s contact with ‘strongly valued goods’. In a similar way, Ricoeur thinks that the past in narrative is only the quasi-past that includes projects, expectations and anticipations of the future (see Ricoeur 1992, p.163). He agrees with Taylor that narrative displays one’s care in terms of the unity of life (ibid.).

Ricoeur’s structural analysis of narrative not only demonstrates the relationship between time and narrative, but also points out that narrative has the capacity to deal with time issues raised by the problematic of identity. Ricoeur proposes that ‘narrative time’, i.e., the temporal nature of narrative structure itself, shows a dialectical process of combining the ‘episodic aspect’ in the chronological dimension of narrative with the ‘configuration aspect’ in plotting a story. This analysis offers a solid ground to justify the temporal nature inherent in the structure of narrative as a linguistic mode. Here, narrative is important to identity in that it provides a temporal totality of one’s life by mediating between linear time and lived time. Bruner seems to agree with Ricoeur and writes, ‘[W]e seem to have not other way of describing “lived time” save in the form of a narrative’ (Bruner 2004, p.692). Also Ricoeur
demonstrates the significance of *permanence in time* in both identity as self-sameness and identity as self-constancy, and maintains that identity constructed by narrative acts as an ideal mediating role between two types of permanence in time.

2. **Narrative as a mediating structure**

Narrative’s mediating capacity provides a dynamic understanding of identity. As I have shown, in Ricoeur’s theory, the concept of personal identity contains many dialectical dimensions. These include, for example, dimensions between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity, between sedimentation and innovation, between life history and personal imagination, between *concordance* and *discordance* and so on. All these dialectics can be mediated through a narrative structure in various ways. Similarly, according to Taylor, the articulation of one’s moral identity contains a dialectical dynamism between implicit and explicit dimensions. Narrative as a form of articulation mediates between implicit and explicit moral assumptions. Narrative articulates identity from an implicit level (as a result of internalization of culture) towards an explicit level so as to empower oneself to move towards strongly valued good.

Bruner also perceives a similar capacity of narrative in his work *Acts of Meaning* (1990), through discussing what he calls ‘three domains’. The division between an inner world of experience and outer one that is autonomous of experiences ‘creates three domains, each of which requires a different form of interpretation’ (Bruner 1990, p.40). The first ‘is a domain under the control of our own intentional states: a domain where Self as agent operates with world knowledge and with desires that are expressed in a manner congruent with context and belief’ (ibid., pp.40-41). The ‘third class of events is produced “from outside” in a manner not under our own control. It is the domain of
“nature.” In the first domain we are in some manner “responsible” for the course of events; in the third not’ (ibid.). There is a second class of events that comprises ‘some indeterminate mix of the first and third, and it requires a more elaborate form of interpretation in order to allocate proper causal shares to individual agency and to ‘nature’ (ibid.). Bruner suggests that it is exactly narrative that mediates between the first domain and the third one.

However, let me stress, it is Ricoeur who shows us a detailed and encompassing structural analysis of the mediating role of narrative. The emplotment of narrative structure mediates between discordance and concordance at various levels of reality of action. This mediation makes a ‘heterogeneous synthesis’ of a ‘life’ possible, and thus makes a life story readable and its conclusion acceptable. In this sense, if identity as life story is intelligible, meaningful and coherent, it is because narrative structure conveys a dynamic power of ‘grasping together’ through its mediating function.

3. Narrative as structure of heterogeneous synthesis

As I have shown in Ricoeur’s theory, narrative has capacity to arrange and organize various events, actions, occurrences guided by plot. Narrative can ‘grasp’ all those discordant elements into a concordant unity. With this narrative unity, we can find a unique identity of a life story; hence, we can find an identity of character in that story. Taylor also suggests, faced with so many forms of ‘goods’, we can arrange them in narrative by allocating them in different periods of lifetime or rank them over one period of time.

The following are some other examples of structural roles of narrative in understanding identity. However, these examples do not mean these theorists do not acknowledge narrative’s interpretative role. In the field of
psychoanalysis, David Polonoff argues that ‘[T]he object of a self-narrative was not its fit to some hidden “reality” but its achievement of “external and internal coherence, liveability, and adequacy” (see Polonoff 1987). Social psychologist Kenneth Gergen classified narrative form into a structure with three sub-forms in clarifying his notion of moral identity: *stability narrative*, *progressive narrative* and *regressive narrative* (see Gergen1998). The sociologist Giddens has considered that identity has turned from ‘given’ to ‘task’ (see Giddens 1990). Identity changes frequently due to external changes. Giddens then contends that a coherent identity can be acquired through keeping the narrative of one’s life going, because narrative has the capacity to construct various events and changes into a biography coherently and reasonably.

5.4.2. Category of interpretative roles of narrative in understanding identity

1. *Narrative as a conveyer of meaning of culture, norms and history*

Narrative’s cultural nature presents a multi-dimensional aspect of identity. Ricoeur and Taylor maintain that narrative identity entails both individual identity and community identity. According to Ricoeur, both individual identity and community identity can be identified through narrative as the intertwining of historical narrative and fictional narrative. As Ricoeur writes, ‘an examined life is, in a large part, one purged, one clarified by the cathartic effects of the narratives, be they historical or fictional, conveyed by our culture’ (Ricoeur 1988, p.247).

Taylor believes that identity is ‘enframed in a social understanding of great temporal depth, in fact, in a “tradition”’ (Taylor 1989, p.39). This shows that Taylor locates personal narrative in the context of culture and history. He maintains that an articulator can find out the meaning of one’s life as a whole from narrative by locating personal narrative in a history or tradition as I
discussed before. As he writes, ‘One way in which people do this is to relate their story to a greater pattern of history, as the realization of a good’, because the secret of strength of historical narratives ‘is their capacity to confer meaning and substance on people’s lives’ (ibid., p.97). According to Taylor, personal identity cannot be separated from the community one lives in. As he puts it, ‘the self-interpretations which define him [an individual] are drawn from the interchange which the community carries on’ (Taylor 1985a, p.8 cf. p.11, p.209; 1989, p.38).

Taylor’s notion of the role of narrative as a combination of personal and collective stories is endorsed by some other theorists. For example, Bruner has written in one of his papers that discuss the relationship between narrative and culture, ‘…the tool kit of any culture is replete not only with a stock of canonical life narratives (heros, Marthas, tricksters, etc.), but with combinable formal constituents from which its members can construct their own life narratives: canonical stances and circumstances, as it were’ (Bruner 2004, p.694). Also, Appiah argues for this point in terms of a multicultural context,

‘…crossculturally it matters to people that their lives have a certain narrative unity; they want to be able to tell a story of their lives that makes sense. The story – my story – should cohere in the way appropriate by the standards made available in my culture to a person of my identity. In telling the story, how I fit into the wider story of various collectivities is, for most of us, important’ (Appiah 1994, p.160 cited in Abbey 2000, p.216).

Narrative thus has multi-levels of meanings. It is not only about something personal, it is at the same time about something cultural, historical and social. Narrative identity is therefore not only about a sense or identification of a self. Narrative identity is a ‘self’ as being understood narratively by and through
certain aspects of culture, history and social context.

2. Narrative as a ground for self-interpretation

Narrative’s meaning-making capacities present different paths from which to understand identity. Ricoeur and Taylor hold the Hermeneutic view that the central question of self-interpretation is closely linked with questions about one’s personal identity (Ricoeur 1992, p.114; Taylor 1976, p.281; see also ‘introduction’ 1985 a/b; 1989, p.34). Ricoeur considers that narrative, as a form of self-interpretation, is a ‘privileged form of mediation’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.114)). Taylor holds that narrative is an ‘inescapable structure’ in meaning-making of one’s life and identity (Taylor 1989, p.52).

The agreement between Ricoeur and Taylor on this point suggests that narrative does have something to do with the capacity for meaning-making and remaking. Narrative is a central form of articulation. In Ricoeur’s view, ‘Narrative has its full meaning when it is restored to the time of action and suffering in mimesis 3’ (Ricoeur 1984, p.70). The refiguration (mimesis 3) takes place between the world of text narrated and the world of readers, which is exactly the process of self-identification of any individual or community through the act of reading. It is through the act of reading that the refiguration of narrative is possible, and that making a narrative resignifies the world in its temporal dimension to the extent that narrating, telling, reciting is to remake action following personal experiences and imagination, and that the new meaning of the narrative can be added, shaped and created based on the original narrative. Ricoeur’s idea is based on the theory of reading from Wolfgang Iser (1978) and theory of reception from Robert Jauss (1982) who both agree that the text is a set of instructions that the individual reader or the reading public executes in a passive or a creative way (see Ricoeur 1984, p.77).
Reading one’s life story then acts as a role of self-interpreting mediated between one’s narrative identity and his/her life. This is because the plot in a life story acquired from culture conveys the meaning of good or bad, sadness or happiness. The imagination to be someone conveyed in narrative is also largely borrowed from and adjusted by culture, norms and one’s past experiences. This mode of self-interpretation is thus a kind of narrative understanding of oneself.

Likewise, Taylor maintains that the meaning/sense of personal identity can be articulated through self-interpretation. One’s place in ‘moral space’ vis-à-vis strongly valued good over time can only be understood as ‘an unfolding story’ (Taylor 1989, p.47). Narrative serves as the basis for self-interpretation, contains the language of ‘strong evaluations’ (which refers to the ‘worth’ of different desires, feelings, actions or modes of life). Narrative hence serves as the articulation of self-concern underpinned by certain moral assumptions. As Taylor shows, narrative makes meaning for personal identity as a whole through articulating one’s implicit moral ontology, through comparing, arguing and evaluating different interpretations as ‘biographical transition’, through arranging pluralist views and through inventing something unique by using one’s ‘powers of expression’ (ibid., p.18).

3. Narrative as a space for evaluative reflection
Narrative’s reflexive nature provides an evaluative understanding of identity. Taylor shows that the ‘self’ cannot be understood or explored as a mere ‘object’ in impersonal terms dominated by mainstream social sciences, which are free from evaluative language. The self, as he repeats, is also a being in a ‘space of questions’ about the good. Personal identity according to Taylor is partly defined by strong evaluations. Narrative contains the language of strong
evaluation and is a key form of articulation of moral assumptions about one’s moral identity. This point has also been supported by Bruner, ‘To tell a story is inescapably to take a moral stance, even if it is a moral stance against moral stances’ (ibid., p.51). Ricoeur also suggests that narrative as refiguration is inseparable from ethical fields. ‘…narrativity is not denuded of every normative, evaluative, or prescriptive dimension’ (Ricoeur 1989, p.249).

Nevertheless Taylor also argues that moral ontology is implicit and only in times of controversy, conflict or crisis, is one forced to articulate the assumptions of his/moral values (see Taylor 1989, p.9). This process has something to do with what Taylor calls ‘radical re-evaluation’ (see Taylor 1985, p.40). To put this in other words, it is a process of reflecting on our fundamental ‘strong evaluations’ or re-evaluating our moral frameworks. This view has also been discussed by Bruner. As he stresses, ‘The values underlying a way of life, as Charles Taylor points out, are only lightly open to “radical reflection” (Bruner 1990, p.29). Bruner even claims ‘that only when constituent beliefs in a folk psychology are violated that narratives are constructed’ (ibid., p.35). Hence, Bruner claims that ‘the function of story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern’ (ibid., p. 50). In this sense, narrative as a key form of articulation of moral assumptions in respect of understanding identity entails such radical reflection. Such radical reflection might trigger what Taylor calls ‘practical reasoning’, in which different interpretations in narrative can be articulated through comparative argument and finally leads to ‘biographical transition’, as I have discussed before.

Seeing from above, we can say to give a narrative is to provide an opportunity
for people to reflect on what is morally essential to one’s identity and (re)evaluate their meanings to them.

4. Narrative as a tool of expression

Taylor maintains that the new meaning of life can be created through what he calls ‘expressivism’. He maintains, ‘[W]e find the sense of life through articulating it. And modern have become acutely aware of how much sense being there for us depends on our own powers of expression’ (Taylor 1989, p.18). According to Taylor, modern people try to attain the meaning of life by articulating it, and when they do so, they create meaning depending on their ability to articulate their lives. But Taylor suggests, ‘our formulation about ourselves can alter what they are about’ (Taylor 1985a, p.101; cf. 35-8, 191; 1985b: 26-7). Narrative as a tool of expression, with its ongoing refiguration and temporal feature, therefore plays an important role in the formulation of a new meaning of one’s life, hence one’s identity.

5.4.3 Narrative as a double role: both as structural role and interpretative role

The two categories of role of narrative are not strictly separated. Rather, some roles of narrative in relation to identity have to be understood by integrating both categories. The following are two examples.

1. Narrative as self-interpretation by way of narrative as structure

Narrative as self-interpretation plays a central role in attaining the meaning of the wholeness of one’s life, hence the meaning of one’s personal identity. However, this meaning-making process largely relies on narrative as structure.

Both Ricoeur and Taylor stress the necessity of unity of one’s life in understanding personal identity. What underpins this understanding is that
both philosophers acknowledge the fact that a subject always cares about and has concerns or worries about its ‘self’ as a whole over time (see Taylor 1989, p.38, 59, 238; Ricoeur 1992, p.136, 163). To put this in a nutshell, narrative recounts care or self-concern. Ricoeur and Taylor regard narrative as a means of self-interpretation to offer concordance to discordance in one’s life. Thus both thinkers agree that it is the use of narrative that makes it possible to gain a sense of life as a whole, since narrative can produce a thematic or narrative unity of life.

However, this interpretative role of narrative intertwines with structural role of narrative. Ricoeur stresses that through the narrative structure of synthesis, narrative grasps the discordant events, actions, heterogeneous factors and discordant temporal elements into an intelligible narrative of one’s life. Through reading and reflection on this life story, one can gain the meaning of life as a whole, hence gain the importance of one’s personal identity. Through narrative’s temporal structure, Taylor argues for the meaning of life as a whole. Narrative has the capacity to link and reorganize the inescapable temporal structure of the past, the present and the future of human life. Meaning of life as a whole hence needs to be articulated through an unfolding story. Taylor also pays special attention to the importance of unifying discordant ‘goods’ and ‘values’, diachronically and synchronically into a harmonious whole over one’s life. As Taylor suggests, narrative has the capacity to unify the conflicting goods by assigning them different places and times over one’s life (see Abbey 2000; Laitinen 2002).

Similar example is MacIntyre’s notion of narrative in relation to personal identity. He also claims the need for integrity of selfhood and personal identity by way of a ‘narrative unity of human life’ (MacIntyre 1985, p.219). He argues
that we can do this if we think about our lives in terms of a unique story beginning with birth and ending with death. Since life can be gathered together as a whole in the form of a narrative, a subject of actions can give an ethical character to this life. He writes, ‘... personal identity is just that identity presupposed by the unity of the character which the unity of a narrative requires. Without such unity there would not be subjects of whom stories could be told...’ (ibid., p.217). Although MacIntyre mainly suggests using narrative structure in terms of narrative unity to clarify his notion of the self and identity, he also stresses the fact that narrative is inseparable from history, tradition and social community, which highlight the interpretative role of narrative.

2. Narrative as self-understanding borrowed from narrative as structure of human experience gained through interweaving of history and fiction

According to Ricoeur, narrative could be seen as a sought-after structure where both personal identity and community identity can be recognized and understood, which can be called narrative identity on both levels. This is because narrative can be seen as a structure of human experience as a result of the intertwining of personal life story and a community history. ‘Human time’ stands for the combination of the past in history and the imaginative variations of fiction (see Ricoeur 1984, p.82; 1988, p.192). So, in Ricoeur’s opinion, narrative borrows from history as well as fiction, in making narrative identity, that is, identity as a life story, or a fictional history (see Ricoeur 1992, p.114). Narrative therefore has both historical and fictional references (see Ricoeur 1984, p.81-82). As Ricoeur writes,

‘sself-understanding is an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation; the latter borrows from history as well
as from fiction, making a life story a fictional history, or, if one prefers, a historical fiction, interweaving the historiographic style of biographies with the novelistic style of imaginary autobiographies’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.114).

In sum, the roles of narrative in understanding identity discussed above do not exhaust all the roles that narrative plays in understanding identity. They are just salient roles that narrative plays. They are mainly drawn from a complementary understanding of Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories on identity and narrative. But from the roles illustrated above, we can at least conclude that the role of narrative in understanding identity is complicated and multifunctional. Furthermore, these roles of narrative can be generally categorized into two types, i.e., structural category and interpretative category, though both categories overlap in terms of certain roles.

5.5 Differences and issues between two theories
I have analysed the salient roles that narrative plays in Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories of identity respectively and argued that those roles can be regarded as structural roles, or interpretative roles or both. We can see both theorists not only share some common grounds in their thoughts, but also complement each other. Now, I wish to conduct a critical analysis of noticeable differences between these two theories of narrative and narrative identity. The purpose of this analysis is to find out the strengths and weaknesses of these two theories in order to acquire a deeper and critical understanding of their thoughts. An analysis about their differences might also disclose some issues.

5.5.1 What are the differences?
1. Different assumptions of the analysis of narrative
Ricoeur based his structural analysis of narrative largely on the notion of ‘mimesis’. He regards mimesis 1 as his starting point from which to examine
the notion of narrative. *Mimesis* 1 is the preunderstandings of ‘the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources and its temporal character’ (Ricoeur 1984, p.54). He also stresses that some competence is required to gain such preunderstanding. *Mimesis* 1 according to Ricoeur is not only such preunderstanding, but also the result of sedimentation of the innovation produced by *mimesis* 3, which is a consequence of circular processes as I have shown in chapter 3. Ricoeur seems in a large part to treat personal sedimentation as subject’s background to give a narrative identity. He writes, ‘What sedimentation has contracted, narration can redeploy’ (1992, p.122). One of the assumptions that Ricoeur deals with the notion of narrative in such kind of structural analysis is that he attempts to mediate Husserl’s Phenomenology, Kantian schematism and Structuralism in his analysis of narrative (see Steele 2003). There are at least two drawbacks of Ricoeur’s assumptions about his structural analysis of narrative in understanding identity. First, this approach seems to suggest that inchoate narrative from certain preunderstandings and sedimentation can be simply attained by certain competence, and can be well ready to interpret experiences. Such preunderstanding neglects the important role of social interaction in meaning-making in real life. Secondly, stressing the structural analysis of narrative might mean that less attention is paid to the historical, socio-cultural and evaluative dimensions embedded in the language of narrative as discourse. Both aspects discussed above, however, are what Taylor stressed.

Taylor’s idea about the background of narrative is different form Ricoeur’s. In Taylor’s view, the notion of narrative emerges from one’s articulation of moral ontological assumptions or presupposition, implicit or explicit, which results from internalization of norms, including social, historical and cultural dimensions of the human world. The articulation is made in dialogue with and
against other moral languages and narratives of the past and the present (see Steele 2003). In this sense, first, Taylor suggests that there is an interactive or intersubjective dimension in the notion of narrative itself. Second, narrative here is moral, historical and dialogical in any certain cultural context, because, the self, for Taylor exists in the ‘moral space’ and ‘web of interlocution’. The moral issue of our ‘being’ therefore is bound up with our moral language as narrative, which contains dialogues with others and history. According to Taylor, a human being is also a self-interpretive subject and narrative is a basic condition for making sense of identity. Finally, while Ricoeur focuses on the analysis of narrative identity in the world of text in relation to the ‘world of action’, Taylor stresses that narrative is a form of linguistic articulation in the form of moral language in spelling out the moral assumptions of personal identity.

2. Different focuses on the notion of narrative identity

Although Ricoeur maintains that narrative identity as the identity of a life story, a story about actions of the ‘who’, can be seen as a kind of self-understanding that has emerged from the story, he focuses on the structural analysis of narrative identity in trying to resolve the problematic notion of ‘personal identity’. That is, he mainly regards narrative as emplotment where its mediating role is to deal with the dialectical relation between idem-identity and ipse-identity. Taylor, however, sees narrative identity as an unfolding story of the ‘self’ vis-à-vis the ‘goods’ that define one’s moral identity. While Ricoeur’s notion of narrative identity focuses on narrative’s mediating function in understanding the notion personal identity, Taylor’s notion of narrative identity stresses the normative dimension of identity by means of narrative.
3. Different approaches to fulfil the same roles of narrative in understanding identity

The two philosophers suggest different approaches to fulfil the same roles of narrative in understanding identity.

While Ricoeur tells us to seek meanings in understanding one’s identity through the reading of the narrative as ordering/arranging of various types of elements and actions, Taylor shows us to search for the meaning of identity through narrative by articulating the orientation and direction in ‘moral space’, which underpins the actions of an individual. While Ricoeur stresses narrative’s dynamic mediating role in multiple dialectical relations in the notion of personal identity, Taylor underscores narrative’s argumentative role for conflict-resolving and biographical transition in the face of a plurality of goods. As Steele analyses, ‘Ricoeur wants to keep novelists out of the argument business, however, limiting them only to emplotment...This same formalism undermines Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity, since identity becomes the ordering of components and not an argument with other self-conceptions, which is how Taylor understands it’ (Steele 2003, p.429).

In conclusion, on the one hand, we can see that Ricoeur’s notion of narrative identity is more analytical than the ‘thematic unity’ of narrative identity around the notion of ‘the good(s)’ proposed by Taylor. The heart of Ricoeur’s argument on narrative identity, while not neglecting the importance of culture and history, stresses the narrative structure, its dynamic functions and how they work together to help us perceive the nature and unity of personal identity. His notion of narrative identity shows us how narrative takes a mediating role between idem-identity and ipse-identity.
Taylor, however, demonstrates the significance of the narrative capacity to form the meaning of life as a whole; his discussion about how narrative operates and functions in doing this are not satisfactorily sufficient and clear. However, Taylor’s interpretative or normative analysis of narrative in the understanding of identity presents us with a rich meaning of personal identity by revealing cultural, social and historical meanings of identity inherent in narrative. Although Ricoeur does not neglect the fact that narrative is one form of cultural symbols, he does not clarify in depth how narrative’s cultural, social and historical nature can help to shape one’s personal identity. Rather, he chiefly confines his discussion to how the effect that the plot receives from culture may work on one’s self-understanding.

5.5.2 What are the issues?

Although either of philosophers does not confine themselves just to one approach, the differences between Ricoeur’s theory and Taylor’s theory might reflect the gap between the structural analysis of narrative and interpretative analysis of narrative in understanding identity, where certain issues might rise. If we simply stick to just one approach of analysis, it is likely to be at risk of leading to an insufficient or a biased understanding of the narrative conception of identity. For example, David Carr, following the Phenomenological tradition, focuses on structural analysis of narrative in understanding history and real life. He claims that the beginning-middle-end structure of narrative can be seen as an extension of the basic structure of means-end action or human experience, i.e. anticipation/protention, attention and retention. Thus, Carr contends that ‘narration is not only a mode of discourse but more essentially a mode, perhaps the mode, of life’ (Carr 1991, p.173). It can be argued that this view reduces narrative to experience and reduces experiences to life. Experiences without self-interpretations and others’
interpretations, cannot be equated with life, if life is not simply understood in a biological sense. Carr’s view thus might reduce the notion of narrative identity to the structural experience of a person in the reality since he neglects narrative’s interpretative role. Consequently, Carr’s view seems to me an inadequate view of narrative in relation to life and identity. This is particularly because narrative is also about interpretations and meaning, not simply a structure about a selection of events of reality following the sequences of consciousness of reality as a form of discourse.

Also Louis Mink assumes that the beginnings-middle-end structure of narrative cannot be applied to life itself, because according to him ‘stories are not lived but told’ (Mink 1970, p.557-558 cited in Ricoeur 1990, p.159n). In Mink’s view, ‘life has no beginnings, middles and ends…Narrative qualities are transferred from art to life’ (Mink 1970, pp.557f. cited in Carr 1991, p.161). Mink also assumes narrative is just a form of artistic discourse. This raises the issue of ‘truthfulness’ of narrative identity, identity based on life story, because if life story is just told, not lived as ‘real’, how can we accept that ‘our narrative identity’ is ‘real’ or ‘true’ in relation to ‘our identity’? I will discuss this issue in detail in the next part of this chapter. These issues result from overemphasising the structural analysis of narrative, and focusing on structural role of narrative in understanding life and/or personal identity. What these views underestimated or excluded is the interpretative role of narrative in relation to life and personal identity. Thus, it can be argued that we can avoid those issues by combing structural analysis and interpretative analysis into a holistic approach to narrative.

Drawing on what is discussed above, it becomes apparent that the analyses of narrative in understanding identity can be generally categorized into two
approaches towards analysis: one approach is the structural approach to narrative as a linguistic or experiential structure in relation to actions of the self; another approach is the interpretative approach to narrative as a conveyer and/or a creator of self-interpretation and meaning embedded in culture, history and tradition of certain social settings. Although both approaches seem not to be applied in a strictly separated way, different emphasis on either of approaches is perceivable in different theories. Simply holding one approach of analysis will be likely to cause an insufficient and/or biased understanding. Based on this general observation, I therefore suggest that in order to have a deeper and comprehensive understanding of the role of narrative that plays in understanding identity, it is essential to bear in mind the importance of both approaches of analyses to narrative.

5.6 Between life as narrative and life ‘as it is’

Now, as we can see, the role of narrative is multifunctional in understanding identity. This leads us to a conclusion that narrative can be a very propitious mechanism to help us understand identity. Thus we should accept that narrative might be the most useful and desirable tool for use in understanding our lives and our identity. But some might challenge the ‘truthfulness’ of the

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conception of narrative identity. In other words, the question that might be asked is whether we can equate narrative identity to the identity ‘as it is’ in reality. This question is reminiscent of another question, that is, how should we understand the relation between life as narrative and the life as it was/is? It has been widely maintained that narrative as life stories should not be equated with ‘real’ life. For example, as I mentioned before, Louise Mink claims, ‘Stories are not lived but told’ (Mink 1970, p.557-558 cited in Ricoeur 1990, p.159n). As David Carr comments, the theorists who hold this view claim that narrative distorts life either as ‘self-delusion’ or something ‘imposed from without by some authoritative narrative voice’ (see Carr 1991, p.162). Carr labels this view as a ‘standard view’, because it is broadly hailed as a truth by many structuralists and non-structuralists and Carr gives the examples by listing the following theorists: Frank Kermode (1966), Seymour Chatman (1978), Roland Barthes (1966), Louis Mink (1979), Hayden White (1981) (see ibid., p.160-161). In this section, while presenting an overview of the debates, I will put forward my position on this issue by holding a perspective of combination of Hermeneutics and Pragmatic Constructivism. I will clarify my stance that narrative imitates, reveals and transforms life and life imitates, reveals and transforms narrative. Finally, I will argue against the position that narrative identity is not ‘true’ or ‘real’ in relation to the identity ‘as it is’ in reality.

5.6.1 Carr’s view on relation between life as narrative and reality

David Carr is the one who opposes the ‘stand view’ as I mentioned above. He contends that narrative itself is a form or a (the) mode of real life. As he writes, ‘…narration, far from being a distortion of, denial of or escape from ‘reality’, is in fact an extension and enrichment, a confirmation, not a falsification, of its primary features’(Carr 1991, p.162). By referring Husserl’s phenomenological
theory of time-consciousness, i.e., even the most passive experience involves tacit anticipation or protention as well as retention of the just past, Carr argues human reality is hardly a structureless sequence of isolated events. Besides passive experience, Carr argues that this is truer of our active lives. As he writes, ‘...we quite explicitly consult past experience, envisage the future and view the present as a passage between the two’ (ibid., p.163).

He then argues that there is a relationship between the structure of actions in our life and that of narrative. The means-end structure of action is related to the beginning-middle-end structure of narrative. Narrative selects relevant events that are necessary to ‘further the plot’. In this understanding, Carr argues, ‘...life differs from stories just because such a selection is not made; all the static is there’ (ibid., p.164). He further argues, ‘Life admits no selection process; everything is left in; and this is because there is no narrator in command, no narrative voice which does the selecting’ (ibid., p.165). Thus, Carr contends, ‘Narratives do select; and life is what they select from’ (ibid.). He argues that selections actually happen in real life as well. ‘Our very capacity for attention, and for following through more or less long-term and complex endeavours, is our capacity for selection’ (ibid.) We do this selection because we hope to attain a coherence in our life based on those endeavours. The unselected events of life are just ‘pushed into the background, saved for later, ranked in importance’ (ibid.). When we explain our life to ourselves or others, selections-making in real life actually are emerged as acts of plotting of our life stories. Consequently, the art of narrative thus makes a mode of coherent life to us, and this narrative coherence is drawn from life, and does not impose itself upon an incoherent, merely sequential existence. In this sense, Carr concludes that ‘narration is not only a mode of discourse but more essentially a mode, perhaps the mode, of life’ (ibid., p.173).
Thus, Carr disagrees on the point that narrative is an artefact of literary and historical writing and that narrative structure does not track any structure that exists in world. As Carr claims, ‘narrative form is not a dress which covers something else but the structure inherent in human experience and action’ (1986, p.65).

It can be argued, however, Carr’s view is not adequate, though it might be plausible. This is at least because he excludes narrative’s interpretive roles in understanding life. As Ricoeur holds, a hermeneutic circle of prefiguration, configuration and refiguration construct narrative. Narrative is also an interweaving of personal imagination and historical facts. All these features of narrative entail self-interpretation and interpretations of one’s life given by others. Also, as Taylor suggested, narrative contains self-interpretation and language of strong evaluation. Without any evaluative interpretations contained in narrative, one’s experience in reality is simply a series of actions with neutral means-end linkage as Carr suggests. Narrative simply based on experiences in Carr’s view, can hardly be equated with life which is filled with meanings, happiness and sufferings, good and bad. Further, Carr’s view is also insufficient because it is not just that narrative structure reflects a structure of human experiences in reality, it is also plausible that human experiences in reality are informed by the meanings conveyed in one’s or other’s narrative of life. As I have suggested, this inadequate understanding of narrative in relation to life results from Carr’s over-emphasis on structural analysis in narrative.
5.6.2 Ricoeur’s view on relation between life as narrative and reality

In responding to Carr’s criticism, Ricoeur avoids simply understanding the relationship between narrative and life as an oversimplified and direct relationship, that is, narrative as distortion of life, or narrative as a/the mode of life. Ricoeur deals with this issue by not directly choosing either position. Rather, the relationship between narrative and life according to Ricoeur can be formulated as ‘a life in search of its own history’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.181). Ricoeur maintains that what he calls the circularity of the dynamics of triple mimesis addresses the difficulty found in the relationship between life and narrative. In Ricoeur’s view, narrative is not merely imitatings of actions in life, narrative also reveals and transforms life (ibid., p.180).

At the beginning of his argument, Ricoeur offers a deep analysis of Aristotle’s notion of mimesis, i.e., the plot. He maintains that mimesis is not only imitation of actions, but also is the representation of action, which reflects as ‘revelatory’ and ‘transformative’ features in refiguration. Ricoeur suggests that, according to Aristotle’s Poetics, mimesis does not confine its function to the imitating of action, but it evokes ‘a dynamic operativity’ (ibid., p.180). Ricoeur then contends that mimesis also ‘designates a production’ (ibid., 181). He is in agreement with Gerald Else who ‘proposes the term “imitatings” to designate the products of mimetic activity’ (ibid.). In this sense, plot is not a static structure, but an ‘integrating process’ of composition which gives a dynamic identity to the story that is recounted. The process of plotting is completed in the reader or the receiver of the narrated story. How does the ‘dynamic operativity’ of mimesis function? It functions through the circularity of triple mimesis. Ricoeur maintains that life itself is an inchoate narrative, an ill-wrought history eaten away by discords. This is why Ricoeur says that life has a pre-narrative feature. In this ill-wrought history or pre-narrative, an
individual gropes about and seeks a meaning or understanding of his/her life. It is only through the configurational act that discordant history is transformed into a concordant narrative. It is through reading this narrative that refiguration reveals the meaning of my life to me and helps me further transform my comprehension of my life into a different/new understanding of this life, then this new understanding becomes a new part of prefiguration. This integrating process forms a hermeneutic circle. As Ricoeur argues, ‘This circle is not however a vicious circle, because there is nevertheless an extension of meaning, progressive meaning, from the inchoate to the fully determined’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.182). As he concludes, ‘one may say both that poiesis reveals structures which would have remained unrecognized without art, and that it transforms life, elevating it to another level’ (ibid.).

However, Ricoeur admits that life is different from history due to the differences between a theory of action and a theory of history. ‘History tears itself away from life; it is constituted through the activity of comprehension which is also the activity of configuration’ (ibid., p.181). Nevertheless Ricoeur argues, ‘Action, according to Arendt, makes an appeal to history, because history discloses the who of the action’ (ibid, p.182.). Narrative, according to Ricoeur, is an ideal form to do such configuration of action.

Also, in dealing with the relationship between life and narrative, Ricoeur responds to the stance that ‘stories are told and not lived’ (Mink 1970) and its counterpart: ‘life is lived and not told’ in another essay titled ‘Life in Quest of Narrative’ (1991). He argues first against the position that ‘stories are told, not lived’ from the side of ‘narrative’. Ricoeur maintains that the importance of narrative in relation to life lies in refiguration, which corresponds with his
belief of Socrates’ maxim that an unexamined life is not worth living. As he writes,

‘My thesis is here that the process of composition, of configuration is not completed in the text but in the reader and, under this condition, makes possible the reconfiguration of life by narrative. I should say more precisely: the sense or the significance of a narrative stems from the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader...On it rests the narrative’s capacity to transfigure the experience of the reader’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.26).

From a Hermeneutical point of view, i.e. the point of view of interpretation of literary experience, a literary text ‘is a mediation between man and the world, between man and man, between man and himself; the mediation between man and the world is what we call referentiality; the mediation between men, communicability; the mediation between man and himself, self-understanding. A literary work contains these three dimensions: referentiality, communicability and self-understanding’ (ibid.,p.27).

The act of reading narrated life is a way of examining life and has the potential to give new meaning to life. Ricoeur writes, ‘...it is the act of reading which completes the work, transforming it into a guide for reading, with its zones of indeterminacy, its latent wealth of interpretation, its power of being reinterpreted in new ways in new historical contexts’ (ibid.). Ricoeur then concludes that narratives or stories are not only recounted, but also lived. This is because the act of reading is carried out in the interaction between the world of text and the world of reader. As Ricoeur writes, ‘...for reading is itself already a way of living in the fictive universe of the work; in this sense, we can already say that stories are recounted but they are also lived in the mode of the imaginary’ (ibid.).
Then Ricoeur argues against the counterpart of former stance, i.e., the stance that ‘life is lived, not told’ from the side of ‘life’. As has been mentioned above, what Ricoeur maintains is true about the relationship between life and narrative is ‘life in quest of its own narrative’. Ricoeur claimed that he applies Socrate’s maxim to the relationship between life and narrative. He agrees on what Socrates advocates that ‘an unexamined life is not worth living’ (cited in Ricoeur 1991, p.20). As he writes, ‘A life is no more than a biological phenomenon as long as it has not been interpreted’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.28). Then Ricoeur argues that life is a pre-narrative and ‘something like stories that have not yet been told’, and concludes that ‘narrative fiction, is an irreducible dimension of self-understanding’ (ibid., p.30).

In clarifying the relation between life and life story, Ricoeur argues that an examined life is a life recounted (ibid., p.31). The nature of this relation is obviously based on his belief in Socrates’ maxim. Consequently, Ricoeur contends that we need to understand the relation between life and narrative in such a way that ‘fiction contributes to making life, in biological sense of the word, a human life’ (ibid., p.20). But what is recounted life? In recounted life, we can find not only all the basic structures of the narrative but also narrative’s dynamic play between concordance and discordance. Most particularly, narrative mediates between Augustine’s concordant discordance in time and Aristotle’s discordant concordance in plot. This is why Taylor maintains that ‘time becomes human time to the extent that it organized after the manner of narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience’ (Ricoeur 1984, p.3). Through the plot instructed by culture and the imaginative elements contained in narrative, we gain the meaning of our life and elicit an idea of who we want to be.
From all this, we can see Ricoeur believes that the ‘life in quest of narrative’ is a narrative construction and narrative understanding of reality. Life as narrative is neither a mere sequence of events of human reality nor a pure distortion of reality. Life as narrative imitates, reveals and transforms the reality of human life.

5.6.3. Taylor’s view on the relation between life as narrative and reality

Like Ricoeur, Taylor maintains that narrative is an important form of reflection in quest of the meaning of one’s life based on his agreement on the Socratic maxim about ‘examined life’. Taylor believes that we do not just lead a ‘mere life’; we are also moved by certain forms of ‘good life’. With respect to narrative in relation to life, Taylor is more specific in terms of the nature of narrative. That is, Taylor focuses on the evaluative nature of narrative in its articulating a good life. Narrative has the capacity to articulate a certain mode of ‘good life’, because narrative contains the moral language of strong evaluation.

Taylor’s notion of narrative is the basis for ‘one’s understanding of one’s life as an unfolding story’ in relation to ‘strongly valued good(s)’, something about ‘self-concern’. This link suggests that narrative contains moral language. The moral language of strong evaluation does not come from nowhere, but come from practices in life itself through the process of interaction and internalization. As Taylor writes,

‘The meanings and norms implicit in these practices are not just in the minds of the actors but are out there in the practices themselves, practices which cannot be conceived as a set of individual actions, but which are essentially modes of social relation, of mutual action’ (Taylor 1985b, p.36).
He also claims, ‘These must be the common property of the society...Hence they are not subjective meanings, the property of one or some individuals, but rather *inter-subjective* meanings, which are constitutive of the social matrix in which individuals find themselves and act’ (ibid. emph. added).

These arguments suggest, firstly, that evaluative meaning in narrative comes from an inter-subjective situation. The meaning has its origin in intersubjective situations in fact has been suggested in Mead’s early writing on the concept of the self (see Biesta 1998). Secondly, Taylor’s argument also suggests that meaning in narrative has its social, cultural, normative, spiritual and traditional dimensions carried by social practices. Taylor believes that certain identity is ‘enframed in a social understanding of great temporal depth, in fact, in a ‘tradition’ (Taylor 1989, p.39). He argues that articulators can find that personal narrative often embeds or can be embedded in history or tradition, and this is a way to hold a meaning for one’s life as a whole. ‘One way in which people do this (narrative) is to relate their story to a greater pattern of history, as the realization of a good’ (ibid., p.97). He further explains, ‘It’s almost as these schematic historical narratives exercised a force of attraction of their own. The secret of their strength is their capacity to confer *meaning* and *substance* on people’s lives’ (ibid. emph.added). From all this, Taylor seems to suggest that narrative entails characteristics featured in a pragmatic constructivism in relation to reality, that is, 1. *meaning* in narrative is gained through inter-subjective situations in day-to-day realities; 2. *meaning* in narrative is also gained through one’s interplay with norms, traditions and history through social practices in reality.

Furthermore because in Taylor’s view, the self as the being is a ‘being-in-time’ as Heidegger shows, so Taylor believes that ‘[My] self-understanding
necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative’ (ibid., p.50). This is because narrative as a temporal structure has the capacity to connect one’s past, present and future into a ‘thematic unity’.

Seeing from above, given that both the meaning of good life and the inescapable temporal structure of life are embedded in narrative, narrative is constitutive of reality, and it also reflects and constructs reality.

5.6.4 Bruner’s view on the relation between life as narrative and reality

Jerome Bruner holds a social constructionist view and considers that narrative construction of reality is a cognitive achievement. He challenges the empiricists’ and rationalists’ perspectives on the achievement of the ‘true’ knowledge of the world that developed from the tradition of the Enlightenment. He maintains that narrative is a mode of thinking which is concrete and particular compared with thinking that is general, logic and abstract. Bruner tries to show in his remarkable paper Narrative Construction of Reality (1991) that there is an important form of (constructivist) thought in achieving the knowledge of the world apart from the traditions of rationalist and empiricist views. Some domains of knowledge cannot be attained in the same ways that other domains of knowledge can be attained. He asserts, ‘...[M]any domains are not organized by logical principles or associative connections...’ (Bruner 1991, p. 4). He describes some specific domains of human knowledge and skills constitute (or are supported and organized by) something like a culture’s treasury of tool kits. Narrative has an available cultural tool kit and is one form to gain the knowledge of such domain. Bruner argues, ‘...we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative’ (ibid.).
Bruner’s central concern is ‘how [narrative] operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality’ (ibid., p.6). With respect to the relationship between narrative constructed reality and the reality ‘as it was/is’, Bruner maintains, “…Narrative constructions can only achieve “verisimilitude”’ (ibid., p.4, emph. added) and ‘narrative “truth” is judged by its verisimilitude rather than its verifibility’ (ibid., p.17).

According to Bruner, “Narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative’ (Bruner 2004, p.692). He claims, ‘“Life” in this sense is the same kind of construction of the human imagination as “a narrative” is’ (ibid.). Bruner believes that the whole act of ‘telling stories’ is a cognitive achievement, but it is finally ‘a narrative achievement’. He even argues,

‘There is no such thing psychologically as “life itself”. At very least, it is a selective achievement of memory recall; beyond that, recounting one’s life is an interpretative feat. Philosophically speaking, it is hard to imagine being a naïve realist about ‘life itself’’ (ibid., p.693).

He concludes that ‘…a life as led is inseparable form a life as told—or more bluntly, a life is not “how it was” but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold: Freud’ psychic reality’ (ibid., p.708).

In his book Act of Meaning (1990), Bruner argues, from a cultural psychology point of view, how narrative, more precisely autobiography, should be understood in terms of its ‘trueness’. He believes that autobiography can be understood as ‘an account of what one thinks one did in what settings in what ways for what felt reasons’ (Bruner 1990, p.119). Bruner adds that this will ‘inevitably be narrative’ and ‘its form will be as revealing as its substance’ (ibid.). He further argues,
‘It does not matter whether the account conforms to what others might say who were witnesses, nor are we in pursuit of such ontologically obscure issues as whether the account is “self-deceptive” or “true”. Our interest … is only in what the person thought he did, what he thought he was doing it for, what kinds of plights he thought he was in, and so on’ (ibid., pp.119-120).

Bruner obviously links his argument to his notion of ‘subjunctivizing transformations’ which are “lexical and grammatical usages that highlights subjective states, attenuating circumstances, alternative possibilities” (ibid., p. 53).

Bruner’s view accords with Ricoeur’s Hermeneutic understanding of narrative. He believes that narrative of reality is a cognitive constructive achievement realised by means of cultural tool kits. He also believes narrative not only imitates life, but also interprets life. His idea that life ‘as it was/is’ is nothing but the construction of human imagination as a ‘narrative’ suggests that we lead our lives partly based on the interpretation of our own story and the stories we are told. In this sense, it is not difficult to understand why Bruner uses the term ‘verisimilitude’ to describe the relation between life as narrative and reality.

5.6.5 A discussion of my view

Drawing on what I have discussed above, I have come to a view that encompasses elements of both Hermeneutic interpretativism and social/Pragmatic constructivism in understanding the relation between life as narrative and life as reality.

What Carr and Mink exclude is the fact that narrative is also about interpretation and re-interpretation as a Hermeneutic understanding.
Narrative is not simply a form of the selection and order of ‘human events’, because any narrative has been already based on certain interpretations or meanings in certain cultural and social contexts, if that narrative, to use Ricoeur’s term, is to be ‘intelligible’. Thus, narrative should not be merely understood as a structure of the configuration of one’s consciousness or simply a form of art. The meanings of action embodied in narrative are largely from one’s self-interpretation constructed by and through one’s interaction with others within certain social, moral and historical, human contexts. As Goodson stresses, ‘The life story script, far from being autonomous, is highly dependent on wider social scripts… The life story therefore has to be culturally located as we pursue our understandings’ (Goodson 2006, p.15). These ideas are invisible in Carr’s and Mink’s view.

Given narrative structure’s constructive activities, mediating functions and Hermeneutic nature, I would follow Ricoeur and take a hermeneutic stance that narrative imitates, reveals and transforms life. This has been seen through Ricoeur and Bruner’s argument for the implications of imaginative elements in a narrative construction of reality, which is relevant to what Ricoeur calls narrative understanding as a corollary of emplotment and thought experiments that might change the landscape of one’s life. But I would like to add that life to some extent also imitates, reveals and transforms our life stories. Life events and facts, that have happened or that will happen, are largely organized and visible in a narrative form. So, changes in life’s trajectory change one’s life story as well. For example, big contingent occurrences in one’s life might affect one’s life plan that is based on one’s ‘care’ of one’s life as a whole project constructed in his/her narrative of life.

This mutual relationship between life as narrative and reality can be supported
by the adoption of a Pragmatic Constructivist perspective by examining the relationship between meaning conveyed in narrative language and the meaning inherent in human reality. On the one hand, narrative, as a conveyor of the language or meaning of self-interpretation, culture, norms and social settings, is the result of social interaction in daily life. On the other hand, narrative itself is also a key means by which social interaction can be conducted and carried on. The meaning of life is gained by articulation of one’s moral assumptions about that life, which are shaped through social interaction both in inter-subjective situations and in an individual’s internalization of reality, e.g., culture and the norms of the community, which are themselves conveyed in narrative. Narrative in this sense is constitutive of reality and tradition; something which has been shown by Taylor to us. In this sense, it could be argued that there is a dynamic interactive relationship between life as narrative and life as reality.

5.7 Between narrative identity and identity ‘as it is’

Now regarding the issue of ‘truthfulness’ of narrative identity in relation to identity ‘as it is’ in reality, I wish to construct an argument based on the background of Ricoeur’s and Taylor’s discussions about the relationship between life as narrative and life in reality.

5.7.1 Narrative identity is subordinated to reality

Firstly, the key assumption that Ricoeur relates narrative identity to personal identity has something to do with the notion of narrative of life, i.e., in its original meaning, the imitation of actions in reality. So, between identity ‘as it is’ and narrative identity, there seems to be a passage. Ricoeur argues that it is exactly the dynamic of emplotment that occupies that passage.
Identity ‘as it is’ in reality, according to Ricoeur can be seen as *identity of character* discovered in the story constructed by plot/emplotment which is first applied to the action in reality that is recounted in narrative. This view is based on Ricoeur’s understanding of Aristotle’s *Poetics* that the character is subordinated to the emplotment. As Ricoeur writes,

> ‘The thesis supported here will be that the identity of the character is comprehensible through the transfer to the character of the operation of emplotment, first applied to the action recounted’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.143).

This suggests that it is first of all in the *plot* we look for the mediation between permanence and change before it can be conferred to the character. The advantage of using emplotment here is that this constructive act provides a model of discordant concordance on which it is possible to construct the narrative identity of the character.

Ricoeur therefore argues, ‘It is indeed in the story recounted, with its qualities of unity, internal structure, and completeness which are conferred by emplotment, that the character preserves throughout the story an identity correlative to that of the story itself’ (ibid. p. 143). Therefore, it is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character (narrative identity). In other words, it is the identity of ‘life as story/narrative’ that makes one’s narrative identity.

Form this line of argument, Ricoeur suggests that narrative identity (identity of the character) is subordinated to life story as narrative, and life story as narrative is subordinated to *action* recounted in narrative, and narrative, in a large part, is still the *imitation of actions* in reality (see ibid., p.157).
5.7.2 Narrative identity reflects the nature of the identity of the subjectivity
Narrative identity reflects the very nature of identity of the subjectivity. To articulate the nature of the identity in a practical field, Ricoeur clarifies his notion of subjectivity. As I discussed in the first section, Ricoeur maintains that subjectivity is ‘neither incoherent series of events nor immutable substantiality’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.32), but has a dimension of evolution gained through the interaction between sedimentation and innovation. Identity of such a subjectivity is therefore neither simply changing nor merely stable, but a kind of in-between. As he writes, ‘This is precisely the sort of identity which narrative composition alone can create through its dynamism’ (ibid.). Examining his definition of ‘subjectivity’, we can see that Ricoeur suggests that self-interpretation develops and changes under the interplay between sedimentation and innovation. Firstly, as Ricoeur argues, this means that we never cease to reinterpret our narrative identity according to the narratives proposed to us by our culture. Secondly, self-understanding understood as interaction between sedimentation and innovation also shows the difference between a narrator of life and an author of a fiction. ‘It is in this way (of understanding) that we learn to become the narrator and the hero of our own story, without actually becoming the author of our own life’ (ibid. emph. in original).

5.7.3 Narrative identity is a corollary of our self-interpretation of our lives
Narrative identity is the result of our self-interpretation of our lives. As I demonstrated in the last paragraph, Ricoeur argues that there is a certain difference between the narrator of life and the author of a story. This is because there is a kind of interplay between sedimentation and innovation in self-interpretation of the narrator as actor, but there is no such interplay in a fiction entirely manipulated by an author. But Ricoeur suggests, for actors, this
difference is or can be partly removed by certain kind of self-preference or personal imagination of the subjects borrowed from their understandings of the narratives they have read. In Ricoeur’s words, the difference between the actor and the author is or can be ‘partially abolished by our power of applying to ourselves the plots that we have received from our culture and of trying on the different roles assumed by the favourite characters of the stories most dear to us’ (ibid., p.33).

The use of this kind of ‘self-preference’ comes from what Ricoeur calls narrative understanding. As I have discussed above, it is through recognizing the identity of ‘life story’ that makes narrative identity recognized. During this process of recognizing, a narrative understanding of ourselves is gained through the narrative understanding of our life. ‘Narrative understanding of our life’ should be ascribed to structural features and dynamic configuring acts of narrative as well as thematic implication gained from a sequence of events and conducts constructed by plots that are received from culture. Following this definition, firstly, ‘narrative understanding of ourselves’ is gained through the discordant concordance of plots we received from our culture by which we learn how reversals of fortune result from this or that conduct, what is good and what is bad to us and their linkages with happiness and unhappiness. Secondly, ‘narrative understanding of ourselves’ is obtained by means of the imaginative variations of our own ego, which direct us to be our favourite figure or to imitate the role we want to be. As Ricoeur writes,

‘What narrative interpretation brings in its own right is precisely the figural nature of the character by which the self, narratively interpreted, turns out to be a figured self—which imagines itself (se figure) in this or that way (ibid. p.198-199).

In this way, ‘narrative understanding of ourselves’ comes to have a ‘narrative
unity’ or ‘thematic unity’, which is acquired exactly from ‘narrative understanding of our life’. Finally, we recognize our character, the narrative identity, from this ‘narrative unity’ of our life story. However, this unity is not ‘substantial’, but is ‘narrative’ according to Ricoeur. That is to say, narrative identity is found from a structural unity of a story that is instructed by the narrative understanding of one’s life. Therefore, with the help of a narrative understanding of our life, we gain a narrative understanding of ourselves from which we identify our narrative identity. So, we can say that narrative identity is constructed with the help of a narrative understanding of our life.

But how should we understand the term narrative understanding? I wish to clarify that narrative understanding is a kind of self-interpretation. Personal identity is a self-understanding or a mode of self-interpretation. Such self-interpretation is not purely initiated by the self as ego, but it is also the self-understanding of the self instructed by culture/norms. Among cultural symbols, the self finds narrative as a privileged one. Hence, self-interpretation gained from narrative is in a cyclical process of formation that is operated from the outside (others, culture, norms and tradition) of the self to the inside of the self, and from the inside of the self to the outside of the self.

By the same token, one’s personal identity is constitutive of self-understanding of the self which is in its ongoing cyclical activity that is operated from the outside of the self to the inside of the self and vice versa. As Ricoeur maintains, narrative of personal identity or and community identity is ‘borrowed’ from the ‘the criss-crossing processes of a fictionalization of history and a historization of fiction’ (Ricoeur 1988, p. 246). Narrative understanding is hence gained through the effects of narrative’s plots instructed by culture and norms.

In this sense, narrative understanding is partly imposed from the outside of
the self (e.g., culture). However, it is still up to the subject’s ‘self-preference’ or ‘self-concern’ to determine, from the inside of the self, what facts and events to select, what plots to adopt and what character he/she wishes to try to imitate through imaginative variations. Therefore, narrative understanding is also constructed from the inside of the self. Narrative understanding in this double sense amounts to *self-interpretation* that is both instructed by culture and constructed by the self as agent.

Following these discussions, what Ricoeur shows us is actually how ‘life’, a ‘life as narrative’ and ‘narrative identity’ are related to one another with the help of *narrative understanding* as self-interpretation. As he writes,

> ‘Our life, when then embraced in a single glance, appears to us as the field of a constructive activity, borrowed from *narrative understanding*, by which we attempt to discover and not simply to impose from outside the narrative identity which constitutes us’ (Ricoeur 1991, p.32, emph. added).

Likewise, in Taylor’s view, self-interpretation is constitutive of personal identity. Narrative as a form of articulation and a temporal structure play the key roles in one’s self-interpretation of oneself and of one’s life. As I have discussed in the first section, although Taylor’s notion of moral framework which is used to define one’s identity, seems to be imposed from outside, it is still up to an individual’s subjectivity to internalize, accept, evaluate and interpret. Taylor clearly stresses that personal identity is inseparable from self-interpretation. ‘…our interpretation of ourselves and our experience is constitutive of what we are’ (ibid., p.47). Personal identity is not out there in reality; rather it is acquired by and through social interaction between the self (including the self as a mode of self-concern) and social reality. However, ‘my’ personal identity makes sense to ‘me’ only through ‘my’ self-evaluation. Thus,
personal identity, particular moral identity, in a large part, is a self-constructed interpretation, which includes *self-evaluation*, supported by meaning gained through social interaction and self’s internalization of the culture over one’s lifespan. Stressing the social and historical levels of life story, Goodson clarifies, ‘[life] story… provides a starting point for developing further understandings of the social construction of subjectivity; if the stories stay at the level of the personal and practical, we forego that opportunity (Goodson 2006, p.15). Narrative identity in this sense is attained through self-interpretation developed from something outside of the self to the inside of the self and vice versa over time.

In conclusion, narrative identity is subordinated to the identity of the life story that imitates, reflects and transform real life. Narrative identity reflects the very nature of the identity of the subjectivity. Finally, narrative identity accords with our view of personal identity as self-interpretation formed both from the outside of the self to the inside of the self and from the inside of the self to the outside of the self. Can we still say narrative identity is not ‘true’ or ‘real’ in relation to personal identity ‘as it is’ in real life? What is at stake here is that personal identity is not simply a thing that is there for identification, it is also a being as both care of oneself and care of others which are inseparable from self-interpretations. If personal identity is in a large part constituted by self-interpretations and such self-interpretations as narrative keep developing in the interplay between sedimentation and innovation, between external shape and internal imagination, it is hard to say there is something like ‘identity as it is’ in reality. Rather, narrative identity as a concept with its structural and interpretative strengths provides us with an ideal approach to understanding ourselves.
Chapter 6 Lifelong learning, identity and narrative

6.1 Introduction
In this chapter, I wish to take a critical look at some theories of learning that is relevant to personal identity, particularly the aspect of lifelong learning derived from Giddens’s analysis of identity and modernity. I will reveal conceptual and moral/ethical issues in the field of lifelong learning in understanding Giddens’s analysis as a normative condition. I then will present different views as alternatives to those views that are drawn from the normative reading of Giddens’s depiction of identity in a post-traditional age.

I will start with a discussion of the emergence of the notion of lifelong learning. Then I will link the notion of personal identity with lifelong learning. After that I will revisit Giddens’s theory on self-identity and present my critical analyses of his view by examining three assumptions of his idea of ‘reflexivity’ inherent in his notion of identity. This analysis leads me to the conclusion that lifelong learning implied in Giddens’s theory of identity is problematic in that it is a mode of learning merely for the sake of adaptation to external changes, and contains certain conceptual, moral/ethical issues. Next, I will move to the alternative views of identity by employing Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor’s theories of identity and draw out some new understandings about the role of learning indicated in their theories. I will then argue for a critical synthesis of four different views of reflexive learning that is relevant to personal identity and connect them to different theories of lifelong learning. Finally, I will take a critical look at the necessity of narrative in relation to lifelong learning and identity in Giddens’s theory and present different views derived from Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories on the issues.
6.2 The emergence of lifelong learning: from education to learning to lifelong learning

6.2.1 From the discourse of education to the discourse of learning

It has been argued by some theorists that the discourse of education has been largely displaced by the discourse of learning in the last few decades (e.g. Field 2000, Jarvis et al. 2003, Biesta 2006, Martin 2003, 2006). Gert Biesta has argued that a ‘new language of learning’ has dominated theories, practices and policies of education in what he calls ‘the age of learning’ (Biesta 2006b). He asserts that this shift is not a consequence of a single agenda or caused by a single reason, but is a result of various changes in the field of education. As he argues, ‘...the new language of learning is more an effect of a range of events than the intended outcome of a particular program or agenda’ (ibid., p.17).

Biesta further argues that there are four main noticeable trends that contribute to the move from the language of education to the language of learning. Firstly, there has been the emergence of new theories of learning that focuses on

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learners rather than teachers. Traditionally, behaviourist and cognitivist theories of learning stress the role of the teacher in terms of controlling the process of the learning of children and young persons. However, with the emergence of social-cultural theories of learning in school education (e.g. Vygotsky 1978; Fosnot 1996; Lave and Wenger 1991) and with the influence of student-centred approaches to the education of adults (e.g. Lindeman 1926; Knowles 1980), learner-centred education has been widely recognized and is often taken for granted in school and adult education. Secondly, the educational curriculum was based on disciplines that were based on rational and universalistic truth. Now these ‘truths’ are changeable, relativistic and fragmentary in the post/late modern settings and have to be approached by reflexive, pragmatic and experiential ways. Thus, the teachers or experts are no longer absolute authorities on curriculum, knowledge or the source of ‘truth’ and learners are put at the heart of learning process. Thirdly, the trend of nonformal learning activities in adult learning are increasingly popular, e.g. fitness centres, sports clubs, self-help manuals, self-therapeutic books, CDs and DVDs on cooking, gardening and regimen. John Field characterised this mode of learning as individualistic learning given its individualized nature (Field 2000). Fourthly, education as welfare provision for citizens has declined with the erosion of the welfare state. Consequently, learners increasingly become the ‘consumers’ of educational provision. Curriculum in this logic has become a commodity and in educational practice it increasingly is the learner as consumer that has say on the purpose, the contents, the style and the significance of what is learned. This is because the teacher’s role in this sense seems to be regarded as service-provider rather than his/her original role as professional expert. Although what Biesta illustrates cannot exhaust all reasons for this shift, there is no doubt that the series of events that have happened in recent years contribute towards the trend that the discourse of
learning increasingly dominates the current theories and practices of education.

The transition from the discourse of education to the discourse of learning is not limited to the school education for children and young persons. The discourse of learning also pervades the field of ‘lifelong education’. This fact has been demonstrated in the high frequency of the use of the term ‘lifelong learning’ in policies and practices in the field of lifelong education in recent years, both nationally and internationally. In the UK, lifelong education is a term considered relevant to the terms ‘adult education’, ‘recurrent education’ and ‘continuing education’, which have different emphases and meanings in the history of education. The notion of ‘lifelong education’ began to be widely accepted from late 1960s and early 1970s because it suggests a more encompassing notion of education and acknowledges that education is a lifelong process for a person that can occur both inside and outside formal educational institutions. The term ‘lifelong learning’ can be seen as a notion that became separated from the notion of ‘lifelong education’ during the middle 1970s and the early 1980s. Originally, the assumptions that learning has a lifelong process are inherent in the notion of ‘lifelong education’, which is an ‘organising principle’ for all education advocated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in a report titled *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow* written by Edgar Faure et al. in 1972. This report claims that to educate a kind of ‘complete man and woman’, both for social purpose and for personal development and fulfilment, an ‘over-all’ and ‘lifelong’ education is necessary and hence an individual needs to ‘learn to be’ over his/her lifetime. The aspect of ‘lifelong learning’ implied in this report therefore can be understood as a human process where individuals conduct their learning under the aegis of lifelong education by
developing a sense of socio-political solidarity, beliefs in democracy and the body of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and emotions for social and personal development and fulfilment over a lifetime. One assumption of such a notion of learning is that all the aspects listed above cannot be learned once and for all during a fixed age range through a fixed period within traditional educational institutions. Although, lifelong ‘learning’ here is spurred on by the notion of ‘personal fulfilment’, which suggests a sense of ‘self-actualization’ and ‘self-realization’, it is still guided by the social, personal and political language of lifelong education. Lifelong learning under the aegis of lifelong education is framed in three such dimensions as social, personal and economic traditions (see e.g., Aspin & Chapman 2001, Edwards et al. 2002, Biesta 2006a).

Over the last decade, the shift from lifelong education to lifelong learning is increasingly noticeable and dramatic. As Cropley concluded, changes in education have a direct effect on lifelong learning practices (see Cropley 1980, p.3). The new concept of ‘lifelong learning’ has been formally defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1996 with an emphasis on learning ‘from cradle to grave’ rather than education. For instance, OECD (1996) made the requirement that ‘learning to learn’ should be ‘an essential foundation for learning that continues throughout life’. Exactly in the same manner, the Commission of the European Communities (CEC) puts the learners at the centre of lifelong education, and explicitly downgrades the importance of the role of teaching,

‘Placing learners and learning at the centre of education and training methods and processes is by no means a new idea, but in practice, the established framing of pedagogic practices in most formal contexts has privileged teaching rather than learning.... In a high-technology knowledge society, this kind of teaching-learning relation loses efficacy: learners must become proactive and more
autonomous, prepared to renew their knowledge continuously and to respond constructively to changing constellations of problems and contexts. The teacher’s role becomes one of accompaniment, facilitation, mentoring, support and guidance in the service of learners’ own efforts to access, use and ultimately create knowledge’ (CEC 1998, p.9).

Thus, it can be argued that these ideas not only devalue the importance of education as a relational concept, but also suggest that an individual should take responsibility for his/her own learning.

Lifelong learning has also become the mantra of government policy since 1990s, with dominant focus on economic dimension (see e.g. Delors at CEC 1994, 1996; OECD 1997; Van des Pas at EU 2001) but with less emphasis on the personal and socio-political dimensions (see Biesta 2006a). Increasingly, ‘lifelong learning’ has become the centrality of policy, including educational policy for lifelong learning, which is dominated by the discourse for economic growth and language of employability. The notion of ‘lifelong learning’ seems to oscillate between ‘learning as a process’ and ‘learning as an institutional phenomenon’. As Jarvis et al. write, ‘...learning has acquired a social institutional meaning in terms such as the learning society, the learning organization and even lifelong learning itself’ (Jarvis et al. 2003, p.4).

6.2.2 Changes and lifelong learning

Although there might be different reasons to explain the shift in discourse from education to learning, one common view is that the pervasiveness of a language of learning is an outcome of rapid changes of modern society in the second half of last century. For instance, rapid social changes have put one fundamental function of education as ‘socialization’ in a difficult position. The notion of modern education as socializing individuals into modern society is
frequently challenged since the actual nature of modern society is difficult to grasp. The structure of modern society, which was originally characterized as stability, rationality, objectivity, universality, emancipation and linear progress, is undergoing rapid changes. The shift from a language of lifelong education to the language of lifelong learning particularly reflects the effects of social changes.

During the second half of the 20th Century, it has been widely argued that we are in a new emerging society which has been given different labels, such as ‘post-modern society’ (Lyotard 1979), ‘late modern society’ (Giddens 1990), ‘risk society’ (Beck 1992), ‘liquid modern society’ (Bauman 2000), ‘information society (Castells 1989), and ‘knowledge (-based) society’ (Bindé 2005). Such labels are characterized as rapid changes and uncertainties in knowledge, technology, economy, culture, and even the person’s sense of the self. Rapid and radical changes in these areas directly influence traditional institutions and individual life. Thus the cries for corresponding changes at global, national and individual levels for adaptation to those changes are increasing.

The changes and responses at different levels to rapid social changes probably can explain the dominance of a language of lifelong learning in the current age. Firstly, the economic changes seem to be so dramatic that rapid capitalization extends into the domain of knowledge as a result of the competition of knowledge economy in the global market. This extension requires ‘learning’ to be a force to produce added value. This change puts learning at the central place in economic competition in local and global milieus. Secondly, changes in knowledge, technology and skills are so rapid that learning concerning different areas of knowledge and technology will never be done once and for all (e.g. knowledge about information technology and biotechnology). This
situation justifies the idea that learning in different areas of knowledge and technology has to be renewed continually and rapidly, hence lifelong learning becomes a significant idea. Thirdly, in order to be able to survive in the sense of insecurity caused by the threat of social exclusion (e.g. to keep being employed), mere reliance on initial education is far from the sufficient, lifelong learning is thus a necessary means to increase human capital for survival. Finally, the impacts of external changes and the decline of stable structures make an individual feel uncertain and disoriented in terms of having external referential points for the self in its construction of personal identity. To find or have a sense of self, or in the modern sense, ‘to be someone’, more than ever, seems to need ongoing quest and learning, over one’s whole lifespan.

Under these changing conditions, unsurprisingly, the new language of lifelong learning replaces the old language of lifelong education. It is in this social background that the concept of lifelong learning takes on a new and central role in current educational policies, theories and practices. This can explain why there is the so-called rise of the ‘learning paradigm’ (Martin 2006) and ‘the new language of learning’ (Biesta 2006b). This probably can also explain why the centrality of policy goals today is variously interpreted as to create a “learning society” (CEC 1996; NCIHE 1997) or ‘lifetime learning’ (DfEE 1996).

6.2.3 Flexibility, reflexivity and lifelong learning

It has been widely discussed that the dominant discourse of lifelong leaning policy is economy and employment-orientated. According to Richard Edwards, this trend is driven by economic competition caused by globalization and personal insecurity threatened by social exclusion, i.e. differentiation between employed workers and unemployed workers (see Edwards 1997, p.29ff). Edwards suggests that in responses to economic competition and individual
insecurity, the need for flexibility in capital markets, in production techniques, in business organizations and among the labour forces seems to be increasingly emerged. Such flexibility implies adaptation to changes both at institutional and individual levels, which implicitly demand ‘reflexivity’ at both levels. As Edwards comments,

‘Changes and adaptation to change have become watchwords of policy, including educational policy. Many such characterizations incorporate a view that contemporary change processes require greater reflexivity by individuals, organizations and societies and that this is achieved through learning’ (Edwards et al 2002, emph. added).

This understanding is particularly noticeable in the late modernist view. For example, an organization/workplace in a late modern context is reflexively organized and reorganized with its capacity to reflect on and learn from its practices in order to change, be adaptable, flexible, competitive, efficient and/or profitable and/or effective. This view seems to be advocated by many new organisational and management theories. However, only when staff members within organizations change, can an organization change. Accordingly, staff members as learners have to flexibly renew themselves in order to help the organisation to achieve its goals. Such a mode of self-transformation is a constant process given the constant changes and competition in capital market. Seeing from this point of view, individual identity as ‘a reflexive project’ seems to become the rationale for managing organization and managing workers, hence a governing principle of work-based learning.

The need for flexibility and reflexivity at institutional and individual level can explain why one of the notable things in today’s theories and policies about lifelong learning is the rising interest in references to notions of ‘flexibility’ and
‘reflexivity’. For example, Barry Hake summarized four words of European Union’s lifelong learning policy and two of them are ‘flexibility’ and ‘individual responsibility’ (Hake 1998, p.34). Many academic contributions to the field of lifelong learning have argued that ‘reflexivity’ implied in policy and practice of lifelong learning is linked with or drawn from the notion of ‘reflexivity’ in the late modernist view of some influential sociologists like Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck. Their notions of ‘reflexivity’ are quite similar and seem to be considered in a normative manner as theoretical sources for the theory, policy and practice of lifelong learning today. For example, Hake argues, ‘Giddens’ discussion of the structural necessity of reflexivity provides one way of understanding why learning is a permanent feature of social life in late modern societies’ (Hake 1998, p.33). By referring to Beck’s notion of ‘individual reflexive modernization’ (1986), Hake argues, ‘A corollary of organizational reflexivity is intentional learning as a vehicle for “individual reflexive modernization” and ‘late modern societies are typified by learning challenges and necessity of lifelong learning as a structural characteristic’ (Hake 1998, p.39). He even claims that ‘learning can be understood as an active acquisition and application of knowledge and skills in all forms of social interaction. From this perspective, lifelong learning is constructed by learners themselves in the very process of institutional, organizational and individual reflexivity’ (Hake 1999, p.88). Likewise, Field argues, ‘they (Giddens and Beck) certainly contribute something to our understanding of the scope of lifelong learning, as well as of its ultimate significance’ (Field 2000, p.61) and ‘their work seems to me central in grasping the underlying function and place of lifelong learning in contemporary societies’ (ibid., p.62).
The social-economic institutional meaning added to the concept of lifelong learning as a human process causes a great deal of confusions and problems in understanding this notion itself, because this makes it difficult to distinguish clearly between lifelong learning as a human process of learning throughout one’s life and lifelong learning as government strategy. Lifelong learning as ‘learning to be’ has seemed to shift towards lifelong learning as ‘learning to be flexible’, ‘learning to adapt’ and ‘learning to survive’ in the face of rapid changes in our societies. The questions that have emerged are: is learning, particularly lifelong learning, simply underpinned by changes? Should learning that is relevant to one’s identity simply be a kind of reflexive learning that will enable the individual to be ‘flexible’?

6.3 Personal identity and lifelong learning

6.3.1 Personal identity as a ‘thing’ and as a ‘being’

In this chapter, I want to frame the notion of personal identity in two ways and to discuss them in terms of their importance to a person him/herself and in relation to others. My two approaches to the notion of personal identity are identity as a ‘thing’ and identity as a ‘being’. Firstly, as a ‘thing’, personal identity is not, at least not merely ‘made’ or ‘created’ at one’s will. The view that identity is created has been very popular and taken for granted by many as a norm, which is largely based on the modern idea of ‘self-actualization’ and ‘self-realization’. However, it can be argued that personal identity primarily needs to be explored, found, understood and interpreted at least because what is inherent in the concept of personal identity is the notion of temporality. That is to say, this is not only because personal identity is a ‘thing’ that an individual has and is formed through sedimentation and internalization over time, which needs to be examined through its history. This is also because personal identity as a concept is inseparable from the notion of permanence in
time, a notion that is in tension with the notion of change. This is not to say that personal identity as a ‘thing’ is simply given; it is also a product constructed by the self. However both senses are conditional upon permanence in time. Personal identity is the certain trait (or a set of traits) that one has and which can be identified and re-identified as the same person by both oneself and others.

Secondly, personal identity is significant for a person in that it is about the self as a ‘being’, and the nature and kind of such a being in a world, or about questions related to being a unique ‘person’ in a human world. Personal identity as a being can further be understood in two senses. First, the being, or existence of a ‘person’ fundamentally concerns the ‘meaning’ or ‘worth’ of one’s life, if the notion of ‘a person’ is not confined to biological sense. Such meaning is acquired through and shaped by society, culture and moral views that one experiences with others. Second, personal identity as being is found, by himself/herself and/or others, in the way that he or she responds to others in an intersubjective world. This implies that personal identity contains an ethical dimension. It is an identification of a unique subjectivity as self-constancy that expresses one’s responsibility to others and that others can count on.

The multi-dimensions of the notion of personal identity, however, cause plenty of misunderstandings and confusions related to the problematic of this notion ever since the age of Locke and Hume. Nowadays, a much more modern notion called self-identity has been pervasively used by psychologists, socio-psychologists and sociologists to roughly mean personality, singularity and individuality of a person, and even some philosophers (e.g. Charles Taylor) also use this term. One reason for the popular use of the term self-identity
might be because it can particularly refer to the self that is identified or made by a person himself/herself, rather than by others. But self-identity is not simply an identity of the ‘self’ understood in this narrow way, because it at least also implies something to do with the sense and the meaning of ‘being a person’ in certain social, cultural and historical contexts. Even Antony Giddens acknowledges that the concept of self-identity ‘includes the cognitive component of personhood’ (Giddens 1991, p.53). The notion of self-identity hence should be discussed under the umbrella of the notion of personal identity. In the following argument, I will use the term personal identity or identity to embrace the concept of self-identity, identity as sameness, identity as selfhood and to denote a term that can be used to encompass personal identity recognized both by oneself and by others.

6.3.2 ‘Learning’ and ‘lifelong learning’ that is relevant to personal identity

From my framing of the notion of personal identity, I would say ‘personal identity as being’ is fundamentally significant for being a person in the human world. This is not only because it confers meaning to the life of oneself, but also because personal identity as responsibility to others in intersubjective world provides a stable referent for oneself and for others in respect of how one can live harmoniously with what and who is other and different. In this sense, one’s learning that is relevant to personal identity concerns a question of whether one can acquire certain meaning for one’s life and a question of whether one can nourish a harmonious relationship with others in one’s life. Learning that is relevant to personal identity is therefore not only about learning as developing self-understanding, but also about learning as responding to others (see Biesta 2006b).
At least two other features of learning that is relevant to identity can be recognized. Firstly, learning that is relevant to identity is a mode of learning that may happen everywhere, from school, workplace to home, and any time, from pre-school to post retirement. This is because consciousness of or reflection on the identity of oneself can be triggered by any events at any time in the interaction between oneself and the world one experiences. This feature also implies that one’s learning connected with personal identity could be a lifelong process. Secondly, learning that is relevant to personal identity not only leads to development of personal understanding, but also leads to personal changes. One cannot understand oneself once and for all, because one’s self-understanding is developing with one’s increasing experiencing of the world. We experience the world from birth to death, in different historical times, social contexts, cultures, and in interaction with others. Our understanding about ourselves develops in our lives and spans over our lifetime. Again, from this feature, learning concerning personal identity is a process of lifelong learning.

6.3.3 Normative reading of Giddens’s analysis and reflexive learning that is relevant to identity

Giddens has argued in a brief article on lifelong learning in terms of changing something about oneself in the context of social transitions. He writes, ‘Although training in specific skills may be necessary for many job transitions, more important is the development of cognitive and emotional competence’ (Giddens 1998, p.125 cited in Field 2000, p.138). Edwards et al. confirm that in the theories of Giddens (1991) and Lash & Urry (1994), there seems to be a certain kind of reflexive learning which is relevant to development of one’s self. As Edwards et al. suggest,
'For us, in adopting a learning approach to life, one is able reflexively to negotiate a trajectory through the insecurity and risks associated with change processes. Implicit here is a view that the reflexivity associated with contemporary change processes entails forms of learning that develop a capacity for questioning one’s self and the historical and social circumstances from which action to accomplish change may envisioned and resourced’ (Edwards et al. 2002, p.531).

However, Giddens’s analysis and description has been pervasively hailed as a normative understanding of the nature of an individual concerning work, personal life and identity in modern Western societies. Particularly, his analysis or similar views have been adopted as a norm, a central agenda or the basis for theoretical assumptions in the field of lifelong learning, especially in work-related learning in relation to one’s identity questions, in the last two decades. This normative understanding can evidently be found in the policies of lifelong learning. For example, Albert Tuijnman suggests that current lifelong learning policies and practices are assigned their meaning in a situation characterized by uncertainty, change and anticipated further structural adjustment (see Tuijnman 2003). He asserts that according to The Commission of the European Union (CEC 1997), lifelong learning ‘is being considered a means for raising the skills of workers: making already well-trained people even more flexible and productive, while upgrading the skills of the poorly trained who otherwise would probably face unstable jobs, low wages or unemployment’ (Tuijnman 2003, p.8). In fact, CEC (1998) even claims that ‘learners must become proactive and more autonomous, prepared to renew their knowledge continuously and to respond constructively to changing constellations of problems and contexts (CEC 1998, p.9). A similar normative view can also be seen in a claim made by the Information Society Forum:
'The pace of change is becoming so fast that people can only adapt if the Information Society becomes the “Lifelong Learning Society”. In order to build and maintain competitive economic advantages, skills and talents must be constantly reshaped to meet the changing needs of the work place, wherever that is’ (Information Society Forum 1996, p.2 cited in Field 2000, p.18).

The notion of changes seems to become a justification for the ‘universal’ need for reflexive learning concerning personal identity vis-à-vis one’s life. This view seems to be read as a ‘norm’ and has extended into the field of lifelong learning. John Field has argued that there is a ‘silent explosion’ of non-formal forms of learning nowadays which are characterized as ‘individualistic’ learning, e.g. fitness centres, sport clubs, self-help therapy manuals, internet learning, self-instructional video’s, DVD’s and CD’s, and so on (Field 2000, p.35 ff.). The content and purpose of adult learning, Field argues, have shifted from collective-directed to self-directed, i.e. a learning towards dealing with a learner himself or herself, e.g. with one’s body, one’s identity, and one’s relationship to others – a phenomenon which Field considers has something to do with individual ‘reflexive modernization’ (ibid., p.58). Field has claimed that ‘our informal learning now tries to deal, however unsatisfactorily, with fundamental questions about our individual identity and intimate relations’ and ‘more over, these have now become defining characteristics of our way of life’ (ibid., p.67). He believes that the ‘silent explosion in informal and self-directed learning’ concerning the transformations in individuals’ identities has something to do with the economic, social and cultural changes (ibid.,ix). Field seems to assume such a relation is an expression of ‘reflexivity’ in late modernist views. As he writes, ‘Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, have made what they call “reflexivity” a central part of their thinking: for both, late modernity is characterised by the requirement placed upon individuals and institutions to reflect upon what they know in order to make their choices.
about who they are and how they behave’ (ibid., p.x). Focusing on ‘individuals’, Hake claims, ‘Individuals increasingly have to assume personal responsibility for formulating their identities and life courses’ (Hake 1999, p.85). This view is evidently based on Giddens’ notion that ‘self-identity has become a reflexive achievement’ (Giddens 1991, p.215). Likewise, Alheit (1995) links his notion of ‘biographical learning’ to the transitions characteristic of late modern society. He defines ‘biographical competency’ as ‘the ability to attach modern stocks of knowledge to biographical sources of meaning and, with this knowledge, to associate oneself afresh’ (Alheit 1992 cited in Hake 1999, p.86). This agrees with Giddens’ view on the importance of some input of modern knowledge and information in forging one’s self-identity. The key idea in these views seems to advocate a mode of learning towards a ‘flexible’ identity. These views of learning concerning self or personal identity are closely related to Giddens’s analysis of identity and reflexivity and seem to read his analysis as a normative phenomenon in our age.

While it is perhaps practical and necessary for an individual to be flexible in terms of learning new knowledge and skills in order to keep himself or herself surviving in competitive and changing working circumstances, I doubt the view of the need for learning towards a ‘flexible’ personal identity through one’s continuous ‘reflexivity’, since the holders of this view simply read Giddens’s analysis as a normative phenomenon. We should realize that the view of reflexive learning implied in Giddens’s ‘late modernist’ analysis of ‘reflexivity’ is just one view of reflexive learning. Hence, we should be careful not to read Giddens’s analysis as a normative condition for lifelong learning that is relevant to identity, considering the limitation of his approach to identity and inadequacy of empirical evidence, let alone the moral/ethical issues inherent in his analysis, which I will reveal soon.
In the following sections, I wish to take a critical look at the need for learning to have a flexible identity through ‘reflexivity’ drawn from the late modernist view. I will do this by revisiting Giddens’ work: Modernity and self-identity, but rather than giving a general analysis as I did in Chapter 2, I will endeavour to scrutinise this work critically in order to examine the need for a person to develop a ‘flexible’ identity.

6.4 Giddens’s view on modernity, self-identity and reflexivity

In his work Modernity and Self-identity (1991), Giddens claims, ‘Modernity must be understood on an institutional level’ (ibid., p.1). He further writes, ‘In this book I use the term “modernity” in a very general sense, to refer to the institutions and modes of behaviour established first of all in post-feudal Europe, but which in the twentieth century increasingly have become world-historical in their impact’ (ibid., p.15). For Giddens, ‘high (late) modernity’ refers to ‘the current phase of development of modern institutions, marked by the radicalising and globalising of basic traits of modernity’ (ibid., p.243). He claims that in late modern settings, ‘new mechanisms of self-identity’ are ‘shaped by – yet also shape – the institutions of modernity’ (ibid., p.2).

In what way do institutions of modernity and self-identity shape each other in late modern settings? According to Giddens, one way they shape each other is through the interplay of institutional reflexivity of modernity and reflexive monitoring of action of the agent. Why in Giddens’s view is it claimed that identity in the current age has become a problem? His answer is that the problem is caused by the negative impact of the modernity on the self. High modernity is characterised as ‘uncertainty’. But ‘it is not just that more or less
continuous and profound processes of change occur; rather, change does not consistently conform either to human expectation or to human control’ (ibid., p.28). This view is bound up with the dynamic of institutional reflexivity of modernity, that is, ‘[t]he chronic entry of knowledge into the circumstances of action it analyses or describes creates a set of uncertainties to add to the circular and fallible character of post-traditional claims to knowledge’ (ibid.). Giddens then claims that ‘“[f]utures” are organised reflexively in the present in terms of the chronic flow of knowledge into the environments about which such knowledge was developed – the very same process that, in an apparently paradoxical way, frequently confounds the expectations which that knowledge informs (ibid., p.29). The ‘uncertainties’ resulting from the reflexivity of institutions of modernity cause the self new anxieties, dangers and opportunities (see ibid., p.13), since there seems to be no more fixed reference points to a person for the construction of the self. New anxieties and risks\(^2\) in terms of the existential questions about an individual’s being in the world are created and have emerged from both his/her trust to the disembedding mechanism\(^3\) and uncertainties inherent in that mechanism. These anxieties and risks threaten one’s ontological security purchased by modernity (see ibid., p.19-20), though securities (certainties) and new possibilities are also created as a consequence of modernity. Media (e.g. newspaper, TV etc.) as a product of modernity are both expressions and instruments of the disembedding mechanism and globalising tendencies of modernity, from which no one can escape. Thus, Giddens concludes that ‘[t]he reflexivity of modernity extends

\(^2\) Risk here can be understood as a consequence of a mode calculable thinking among a variety of possibilities in terms of colonization of the future.

\(^3\) Disembedding mechanism is a character of the dynamism of modernity which separates interaction from the particularities of locales and which includes symbolic tokens and expert systems reorganized and reconstituted by institutional reflexivity.
into the core of the self’ (ibid., 32).

However, Giddens also stresses that the self is not a passive entity. As he explains, ‘[t]he social conventions produced and reproduced in our day-to-day activities are reflexively monitored by the agent as part of “going on” in the variegated settings of our lives’ (ibid., p.35). This reflexive monitoring of action is ‘characteristic of all human action, and is the specific condition of that massively developed institutional reflexivity’ (ibid.). Consequently, Giddens suggests that institutional reflexivity mobilises reflexivity of the self as agent, and at the same time that reflexivity of the agent makes institutional reflexivity possible; what exists between two kinds of ‘reflexivity’ is an area of interplay. As he claims, ‘[t]he self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications’ (ibid., p.2).

The position Giddens holds regarding the relationship between modernity and the self pave the way for the heart of his theory about the self: ‘in the context of a post-traditional order, the self becomes a reflexive project’ (ibid., 32, emph. in original), and ‘in the settings of what I call ‘high’ or ‘late’ modernity – our present-day world – the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made’ (ibid., p.3 emph. added.). Self-identity, in late modern settings, ‘is not something that is just given, as a result of continuities of the individual’s action-system but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual’ (ibid., p.52, emph. added). As Giddens analysed, faced with a variety of possibilities in social life, both negative and positive, created by interaction between late modernity and the self, self becomes a reflexive project based on
the notion of self-actualisation and self-realization, and every individual seems to have no choice but to make lifestyle-choices by using personal resources for his/her life (see ibid., p.214-215).

Furthermore, according to Giddens, a diversity of information and knowledge of abstract systems can reach an individual through modern media, so, an individual ‘must’ integrate them through negotiation, by calculable thinking, with the involvement of the self in such a way as to connect future projects with past experiences. Self-identity nowadays, according to Giddens, seems only to be the self as reflexively understood in terms of one’s (auto)biography through narrative, because narrative has the capacity to (re)organize in a reasonably coherent manner an individual’s ‘uncertain’ life which is in the dialectic relationship between the self and modernity in the rapidly changing social milieu. As Giddens claims,

‘...self-identity today is a reflexive achievement. The narrative of self-identity has to be shaped, altered and reflexively sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life, on a local and global scale. The individual must integrate information deriving from a diversity of mediated experiences with local involvements in such a way as to connect future projects with past experiences in a reasonably coherent fashion’ (ibid., p.215).

Through so-called lifestyles-choice made by an individual, a process of weighing up of positive and negative possibilities, self-identity then can be constructed and reconstructed by an individual based on his/her self-reflexivity. Life-planning for the future, presumably informed by modern science and technology, is hence a central feature in the structuring of self-identity.

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4 Abstract systems: symbolic tokens and expert systems taken generically.
'Lifestyle choice' for Giddens concerns what he calls 'life politics', which has emerged from the centrality of the reflexive project of the self, or self-actualisation and from where processes of self-realisation influence global strategies (see ibid., p.214, emph. added). Life politics is therefore the politics in terms of decision and debate of 'lifestyle' which then affects self-identity (see ibid., p.215). In a word, Giddens suggests that in our age, lifestyle-choice is the central issue that influences the very core of an individual’s self-identity (see ibid., p.5).

6.5 What kind of reflexivity? What kind of identity?

As I have discussed in chapter 2, Giddens’s late modernist notion of ‘reflexivity’ of the self has been criticized for its empirical inadequacy, hidden agenda and individualistic consequences. Lifelong learning as implied in this view therefore has been criticized for its ideological purpose and individualistic nature, and this is why a mode of ‘democratic learning’ and ‘learning democracy’ is urgently called for. However, I would further argue that the notion of ‘reflexivity’ of the self in Giddens’s view is fundamentally based on three problematic assumptions with respect to its relations to human agency, modernity and its referential criteria. What kind of ‘reflexivity’ is it that an individual relies on to continually make his/her self-identity? Why does an

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individual have to make and remake his/her self-identity through this type of reflexivity? Is such kind of reflexivity blind or is it guided by some criteria, and if so what kind of criteria? Furthermore, what will a kind of self-identity made thus be like? All these questions are important if, as I have argued in chapter 2, reflexivity is directly related to the roles of learning and lifelong learning that are relevant to identity. In the following section, I wish to show that: (1) such a view of reflexivity is derived from an active human agency seeking change for the sake of change; (2) this type of reflexivity is radically driven by ‘anxieties’ brought by the interplay between a self as reflexive project and an amplified modernity requiring individual’s adaptation and flexibility to it; (3) this type of reflexivity is guided by the criteria merely within the internal referential system without referring to external criteria. Self-identity made in such a manner is not only unbalanced and narrowly formed in respect of the constitution of identity, but also at the risk of being demoralized and likely to neglect the ethical relationships with others.

6.5.1 An active human agency?
Giddens’s late modernist analysis of reflexivity is largely derived from an active human agency that intends to make changes for the sake of changes. The purpose of reflexivity of the self in this view is much more about construction and innovation of one’s self-identity, and far less about the identification, understanding and maintenance of it. The issue here is: are we what we make of ourselves or are we what we are? No doubt, we would have an encompassing meaning of identity if we put both into consideration. However, in Giddens’s analysis of reflexivity of the self, what one can see is simply a kind of reflexivity ‘mobilized’ by an active agency: a kind of reflexivity for the sake of ‘creating’ and ‘revision’. Furthermore, such an act of reflexivity for self-identity constructing and reconstructing is even supposed to be conducted in a
The view of ‘active agency’ is a view assumed by Giddens. This fact can be seen as follows. Firstly, Giddens seems to agree that the self as ‘a reflexive project’ is a pervasive phenomenon in modern time, since individuals have been emancipated from the control of pre-modern shackles. This view assumes that every individual faces the openness of modernity and enjoys a vast freedom of choice, even including choosing who we want to be as a way of self-actualisation and self-realization.

Secondly, Giddens’s assumed idea of ‘active human agency’ has perhaps also originated from his notion of reflexive monitoring of action which is ‘characteristic of all human action’ (see ibid., p.20, 35). In late modern settings, ‘the reflexivity of the modernity extends into the core of the self’ (ibid., p.32). Giddens assumes that each individual is able to reflexively monitor conventions produced and reproduced in our day-to-day activities as part of keeping himself/herself ‘going on’ in the changing world (see ibid., p.35). Hence, such kind of an ‘active agency’ appears to focus on being sensitive to external changes for the sake of adaptation (to changes) that needs to be given to the self in the changing world. An individual who owns such ‘active agency’ is not only able to, but also has to continually make and remake its self-identity reflexively, given the ongoing changes in modern institutions. Hence, Giddens’s idea of ‘active human agency’ seems to contribute to his view that ‘self becomes a reflexive project’ nowadays.

Following the view of ‘reflexive project of the self’ that is based on this ‘active human agency’, it appears that one’s self-identity will never be found stable and constant and is impossible to be ‘maintained’ in our age; rather it simply
needs changing continually. It also appears that self-identity understood in
terms of ‘self-actualisation’ and ‘self-realization’ should be seen as not only a
‘norm’, but also a ‘priority’, in our understanding of ourselves in our time.
Self-identity with respect to self-understanding, self-identification and
self-maintenance appears to be less important, and perhaps should just be
subordinated to the continual and routine self-making.

However, it could be argued that these assumptions about active agency are
problematic. Firstly, personal identity is not merely ‘made’ and ‘revised’
reflexively and continually. Before ‘reconstructing’ certain aspects of
self-identity, one must acknowledge that he/she has already been ‘somebody’
whose self-identity is either explicit or implicit to himself/herself. The
fundamental importance of the self-identity that one has already possessed,
that has been/needs to be identified and that should be understood as well as
maintained through reflexivity is largely de-emphasized in Giddens’ view.
Secondly, it has not been made clear yet that the self as a reflexive project has
become a universal phenomenon for all individuals. I do believe that there is
considerable number of people who adopt such a view in their lives, since this
view expresses a kind of popular individualism that exists in Western societies
today. Nevertheless, it is hard to find sufficient evidences to show that all or
most individuals of Western societies in different age group today see their
lives and identity purely as a project or task to fulfil, let alone the individuals
in non-Western societies which are becoming modernized rapidly by the trend
of globalization. Thirdly, on a moral/ethical dimension, I do not think that the
view of ‘self as reflexive project’ based on self-actualisation is the best and only
view one should hold nowadays, even though Giddens seems to take a neutral
attitude towards this view. There are at least two problems inherent in this
view. Firstly, the mere rationale of such a view of the self is the idea of
‘rationality’, implying the autonomous control of time or colonization of the future and keeping life-planning manageable and reasonable. This is a stance that does not tolerate contingencies in life. This view does not realize that contingencies like accidents and/or encounters are also a constitutive part of human life and beyond the control of life planning. Instead, this view tries to express the control and mastery of a perfect future or self-actualisation/realization, simply through rational autonomous and calculable thinking and life-planning. Any reversal in human fortune might easily have disastrous effects on such a kind of self. The second problem of a ‘reflexive project of the self’ is that the individual himself/herself has to be responsible for the ‘project’. This view might lead to radical individualism and turn the ‘project of the self’ into an agonizing burden for the individual him/herself over their lifespan.

6.5.2 Radical dynamics of modernity?
The ‘reflexivity’ in Giddens’ view seems to be radically driven by the ‘anxieties’ brought about by the interplay of a reflexive project of the self and the exaggerated dynamics of the institutions of late modernity. As has been shown by Giddens, in late modern settings, self-identity,

‘is not something that is just given, as a result of continuities of the individual’s action-system but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual’ (ibid., p.52).

However, the first question that might be posed is why, in late modern settings, self-identity becomes ‘something’ that one has to work and rework on? To put it more precisely, if we accept that self-identity is not something just given, and if we also accept that the notion of ‘identity’ of the self presumes ‘reflexive awareness’, then, why does self-identity become ‘something’ that one can have
but only through the act of creating and sustaining in short term, and only in a routine and continual manner? The second question that follows is how ‘reflexivity’ is related to this narrowly defined way of coping with one’s self-identity?

Giddens’s answer to the first question seems to be that pervasive uncertainties and changes resulting from the institutional reflexivity of late modernity bring anxieties, risks and dangers to the individuals’ existence in their living world. These uncertainties and changes engender individuals’ concerns about keeping those risks and dangers at bay, and keeping themselves ‘going on’ in a world filled with changes. Thus individuals are forced reflexively and routinely to create and change themselves, and hence make and remake their self-identities. As Giddens writes, ‘[t]ransitions in individual’s lives have always demanded psychic reorganisation’ (ibid., p.32-33), and ‘…the altered self has to be explored and constructed as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change’ (ibid., p.33). The active agency that underpins the ‘reflexive project of the self’ seems to precipitate and exacerbate the ‘anxieties’ that emerge from risks and dangers caused by external changes, since the life plans perfectly made by such an active agency for a controlled future are continually disturbed and intruded by the external unexpected changes. In short, for Giddens, individuals live in a state of uncertainty nowadays. All these interpretations seem to stress a necessity that an individual has to make and remake routinely on his/her self-identity.

However, it could be argued that these assumptions about the interplay between self-identity and modernity nowadays are not sufficiently true. This is firstly because these assumptions not only seem to exaggerate the impact of the dynamism of modernity on the self, but also seem to underestimate the
existence of moral and cultural influences on personal identity. Secondly, these assumptions also seem to advocate the values of ‘adaptation’ and ‘flexibility’ of being a person, which are in conflict with the notion of permanence in time attached to the notion of personal identity. Identity made thus can be seen as an adaptive and flexible identity. I will show just how ‘radical’ this modernity is in relation to shaping personal identity in the following critical analyses.

(1) Giddens seems to suggest that the social changes of modernity have already become the most powerful and pervasive external force in shaping one’s self-identity, which gives himself the justification to claim that an individual has to keep making his/her self-identity adaptable to social changes. But Giddens’s claim that ‘the reflexivity of modernity extends into the core of the self’ (ibid., 30) has not been proven to be a general truth yet both in terms of depth that this type of reflexive modernity reaches to the self and in terms of the scope it covers over population. In terms of the depth that the reflexive modernity reaches to the self, Giddens offers some examples: the paediatrician’s knowledge that is applied to the socialization of children, the rise of therapeutic industries and the popular publishing materials on personal life guide. These examples are regarded by Giddens not only as the means whereby individuals cope with novel anxieties, but also are the expression of ‘reflexivity of the self’ (see ibid., p.33-p.34). However, it could be argued that it is hard to perceive whether these examples are signs of the ‘pathology of the self’ or of what is the so-called ‘reflexivity of the self’.

With regards to the wide scope the impacts of reflexivity of modernity have on the self, it is still hard to hold it to be true either. For example, it is not everyone calls for the help of therapists and expert knowledge in dealing with problems relating to the self and personal life. Hence, it is hard to accept as a
general truth the view that ‘[t]he intrusion of abstract systems into day-to-day life, coupled with the dynamic nature of knowledge, means that awareness of risk seeps into the actions of almost everyone’ (ibid., p.112), and thus ‘everyone is in some sense aware of the reflexive constitution of modern social activity and the implications it has for her or his life’ (ibid., p.14). To some extent, such over-generalization neglects the other dimensions of personal identity, i.e., the roles of morality and traditional culture play in the construction of the one’s sense of the self. It could be argued that even some ‘risks’ are inescapable for certain sectors of the population, those ‘risks’ might not be risks at all for some people through the lens of the moral/cultural frameworks they hold. For example, if one holds the belief that contingencies are natural part of human life, he/she might not feel frightened when facing the negative impacts or possibilities caused by certain modern changes in his/her life. Therefore, although modernity might be radicalised and globalized in the world today, it is problematic to assume that the dynamism of modernity has become such a powerful and pervasive force in shaping everyone’s personal identity that everyone has no choice but to change him/herself reflexively according to the changes posed by that force.

The view of exaggerated modernity can be further clearly seen in Giddens’s discussion about his notions of lifestyle and life-planning in relation to self-identity. According to Giddens, lifestyle is an example of reflexivity, which has resulted from modernity (see ibid, p.81n). Giddens considers in late modern settings, choosing among ‘lifestyles’ has become a ‘must’ for individuals. As he writes, ‘…in conditions of high modernity, we all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so—we have no choice but to choose’ (ibid, p.81, emph. added). This claim clearly indicates that such ‘reflexivity’ is heavily impinged by modernity and therefore seems to be compulsory by nature given the rapid changes of modern settings.
Nevertheless, this claim is doubtful to me in that ‘we all’ have ‘problems’ about lifestyles. More importantly, the question emerged from this claim is why we are ‘forced to’ do so. To this question, Giddens’s answer seems to be that, in our age, on the one hand, with the decline of traditional framework(s), one has no fixed ‘reference points’ for one’s self-construction and the way of living in the world; on the other hand, modernity provides many possibilities, including a diversity of lifestyles. Hence, lifestyle choice as a process of reflexivity of the self among multiple choices and possibilities of one’s life, concerns the making and remaking of one’s self-identity. As he writes,

‘In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options. ...because of the “openness” of social life today, the pluralisation of contexts of action and the diversity of “authorities”, lifestyle choice is increasingly important in constitution of self-identity and daily activity’ (ibid., p.5).

This analysis seems to suggest that lifestyle choice as a kind of reflexivity, which is ‘urged’ on by modernity, increasingly determines the core of one’s self-identity. However I doubt the pervasiveness of Giddens’s view that self-identity becomes conditional upon lifestyle choice. In the meanwhile, I believe this relationship could also be the other way around. That is, it is our self-identity that largely facilitates our lifestyle choice. Charles Taylor has argued that our self-identity is defined by strong evaluation that allows us to decide what is important and what is not to a person in terms of quality of life and the kind of being we wish to be (see Taylor 1989). The lifestyle that a person decides to adopt could be seen as, among others, what is important to that person. Hence, lifestyle choice is largely informed of by his/her strong evaluation that frames one’s identity.

Even if we follow the idea that lifestyle choice is a key factor needed for any
individual to have a self-identity, I doubt that self-identity made thus has something to do with the real ‘core’ of one’s self, because people might just superficially *imitate* or *follow* certain typical or ‘popular’ or ‘new’ lifestyles, adopted by others in living world, or advocated by experts/businessmen in person or through the media. One might just continually shift from one lifestyle to another since he/she might simply *motivated* by the endless desire for adopting countless lifestyles. Thus, it is debatable that our self-identity is conditional upon lifestyles choices, even in the setting of late modern settings.

Another key dimension of Giddens’ view of reflexivity of the self, is his stress on life-planning. According to Giddens, life-planning is significant in structuring one’s self-identity. However, life-planning is frequently in contact with expert knowledge in radical modernity:

‘Reflexively organised life-planning, which normally presumes consideration of risks as filtered through contact with expert knowledge, becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity’ (ibid., p.5).

Seeing from here, expert knowledge and technology in late modern settings takes an assumed central role in life-planning in terms of controlling one’s future and who one wants to be by putting risks into consideration. This is because ‘reflexivity of the self’ in Giddens’ view has the same assumption of the ‘institutional reflexivity of modernity’, which basically concerns about the new knowledge, new information and reasoning required for *control* and *mastery* of the future. But is this possible? And is this pervasive?

It could be argued, however, that Giddens’s idea of life-planning is greatly focused on the involvement of expert knowledge and information. The concept of self-identity seems to have to be informed and supported by modern
information, knowledge and technology concerning one’s life. Hence, this view is not only biased but also considerably narrow. Paul Ricoeur has shown us how the notion of life-planning can be understood differently. He argues that life plans constitute ‘the intermediary zone of exchange between the undetermined character of guiding ideals and the determinate nature of practices’ (Ricoeur 1990, p.158, emph. added). The norms, ideals, values and the role of others that shape one’s identity and that are conveyed in one’s life-planning seem to be excluded or forgotten by Giddens.

(2) Stressing radical modernity seems to suggest that modern person’s identity can no longer be discovered as sameness and maintained as constancy, but can only be created and re-created for the sake of changes. It is still hard to believe that any individual’s response, although based on reflexivity, to the ‘anxieties’ caused by modernity could only be the act of ‘changing’ and/or ‘revising’ in relation to his/her identity. This is at least because an individual might just maintain and/or reinforce his/her original identity that he/she had, which are underpinned by certain moral commitments and/or ethical concerns. In this respect, I do not think the ‘reflexive project of the self’ is a promising view for a ‘stable’ sense of personal identity.

Although as Giddens contends, an individual’s reflexivity can ‘contribute to and promote social influences’ (Giddens 1991, p.2), it is hard to say such kind of influences that an individual has upon the powerful modern social dynamism would be able to change any part of modern institutions. This is one reason why there is a need for individuals to participate in collective/democratic effort for social change. Without collective effort, individuals seem to have no choice but to change themselves for adapting to modernity, i.e., change oneself for the sake of change as continual adaptation to
changing world. Thus, the central implication of Giddens’ view of reflexivity of the self seems to be adaptation and flexibility. As Giddens writes, anxiety ‘is caused by disturbing circumstances, or their threat, but also helps mobilise adaptive responses and novel initiatives’ (ibid., p.13). Côté and Levine comment that in late modernist view, ‘self-identity is … a product of meaning-making as a mode of adaptation to the vicissitudes of late modern society’ (Côté & Levine 2002, p.44). However, if the reflexivity of the modernity moves towards demoralized directions at the end of the day, should an individual also change his/her identity for the sake of the adaptation to that immoral modernity?

It could be argued that to have a stable sense of identity is in a large part to have a sense of sameness and self-constancy of ourselves over time. This stable sense is not only a source of self-esteem, but also what others can count on in us. Richard Sennett writes that character concerns the personal traits that we value in our ‘selves’ and for which we seek to be valued by others (see Sennett 1998). Thus, maintaining a stable personal identity or character, no matter what external changes impinge on us, is significantly essential to a person. Adaptation and flexibility of the person in a flexible society, as Sennett complains, leads to ‘corrosion of character’ (ibid.).

(3) Finally, in Giddens’s understanding, social systems, including the institutions of modernity, in their shaping of day-to-day practice, are even incompatible with other external forces like moralities and traditions. As he writes, ‘[C]rucial to these processes is the evaporation of morality, particularly in so far as moral outlooks are integrated in a secure way with day-to-day practice. For moral principles run counter to the concept of risk and to the mobilising of dynamics of control’ (ibid., p.145). He also claims that
‘[t]raditions of behaviour have their own moral endowment, which specifically resists the technical power to introduce something new’ (ibid.). I do not believe modernity is incompatible with morality and tradition in their shaping of human lives and personal identity, which evidently can be seen from Eastern countries where moral and culture distinctiveness is not removed by modernization and modernity through globalization. In fact, these countries are trying to reserve their moral and cultural uniqueness that appears to be under ‘threat’ in modernization and globalization. For example, Japan, South Korea and Singapore are at the similar level of late modernity as Western countries, but these societies nicely combine their Eastern traditions and cultural characteristics with Western modernity in their unique forms. Also, China, after experiencing The Cultural Revolution from 1960s to 1970s, is now in the process of radical modernization nowadays. However, this country is also experiencing a renaissance of Confucian tradition as a cultural identity for Chinese people. Even in Western countries, religions and cultural values never ‘evaporate’ along with the advancement of modernity.

6.5.3 Internal criteria?

Giddens’s view of the role of reflexivity in making and re-making self-identity is guided by an internally referential system of the self without referance to external criteria. The internally referential system of the self is a system within which the self uses the internal criteria for its development based on an individual’s life project and life-planning. In this view, an individual only uses something ‘true’ to himself/herself to control and master his/her self-development. Giddens writes, ‘The key reference points are set “from the inside”, in terms of how the individual constructs/reconstructs his life history’ (ibid., p.80) and ‘His first loyalty is to himself’ (ibid.). In this view, an individual’s lifespan ‘becomes freed from externalities associated with
pre-established ties to other individuals and groups’ (ibid., p.147). Others only figure in one’s life in his/her reflexive ordering of his/her personal life-planning. The only morality that guides this reflexivity is a morality of ‘authenticity’, i.e., being true to be oneself. As Giddens analyses, ‘Authenticity substitutes for dignity: what makes an action good is that it is authentic to the individual’s desires, and can be displayed to others as such’ (ibid., p.170, emph. added). Thus, authenticity seems to take an important role in self-actualisation.

In Giddens’s analysis, mastery and control of a ‘true’ self for oneself becomes a necessary condition of authenticity. Mastery and control of one’s life, including one’s self-identity, seems to replace one’s reliance on external morality/tradition, by an individual’s living within the parameters of internally referential systems of the self and of modern social life. Giddens’s analysis of this internal referential system even leads himself to the conclusion that underlying the processes of life-planning, the mastery and control of the self of an individual, is the looming threat of personal meaninglessness (see ibid., p.201, emph added).

It could be argued that the reflexivity that only exists in an internal referential system might not only raise moral issues, but also lead to ethical problems. This is because reflexivity within internal referential systems seems not to refer to responsibility towards ‘others’ in its self-identity making. What Giddens calls a ‘pure relationship’ in modern settings is ‘not anchored in external conditions of social or economic life – it is, as it were, free floating’ (ibid., p.89-90). Such a mode of relationship ‘is sought only for what the relationship can bring to the partners involved’ (ibid., p.90). External conditions of reflexivity, such as a moral life and a person as a cultural being, seem to be excluded in Giddens’s analysis.
To sum up, firstly, Giddens’s notion of ‘reflexivity’ of the self is derived from an active human agency with mere purpose of making and changing. Secondly, he amplifies the effects of the dynamics of modernity on the self and overemphasizes the intrusion of social changes into the self and suggests that these are predominant factors in the constitution of the identity. More specifically, he overestimates the prevalence of the changing nature of social life, modern expert knowledge and technology and their contact with the self-identity. This only leads to the creation of an identity for the sake of adaptation and flexibility as demanded by capitalist societies. Thirdly, the notion of ‘internally referential systems’ within which the self performs its ‘reflexivity’ prevents Giddens from including external criteria, such as normative, moral and cultural dimensions of the constitution of self-identity, into his analysis. This leads him to conclude that underlying the reflexive project of the self ‘personal meaninglessness’ is a looming threat. Although Giddens’s analysis of the emergence of ‘life politics’ can be seen as an attempt to re-moralize the individual life, this notion has been criticized. It has been criticized for its apolitical nature in that its underpinning notions of ‘self-actualisation’ and ‘self-realization’ seem to advocate hyper-individualism which in fact is a burden for individuals and which excludes collective/democratic endeavour to solve individual’s private problems.

6.6 Issues of personal identity and learning implied in Giddens’ analysis

Drawing on what I have analysed, it appears that three issues about personal identity have emerged. They are: 1. Are we what we make of ourselves or are we what we are? 2. Is personal identity merely and predominantly shaped by the social impact of modernity? 3. Is the ‘internal referential system’ the only criterion that an individual’s reflexivity refers to in coping with questions
about identity? If Giddens’s analyses of self-identity and modernity face these issues, the *learning* derived from his view of ‘reflexivity’ as a mode of *reflexive learning* which is relevant to making and remaking self-identity in late modern settings needs rethinking. For example, is the ‘reflexivity’ derived from an active human agency the *only* justifiable source of learning that is relevant to identity? Should the reflexivity driven by the ‘anxieties’ resulting from the interplay between self-actualisation and the overstated dynamics of modernity, be the major assumption about learning concerning identity? Can reflexivity guided by internal criteria provide one with a mode of learning towards a good and harmonious life in an age of pluralism? What I can see is that this mode of reflexive learning that is relevant to identity is largely limited not only because it is highly individualistic and burdensome to the individual, but also because it concerns conceptual and moral issues in term of learning to be flexible, as I have shown previously.

The moral/ethical issues relating to this mode of reflexive learning are related to aspects of *lifelong learning* since Giddens’s analysis plays an influential role in current thinking about lifelong learning in relation to personal identity as I have shown in section 6.3.2. It will be hard to realize the importance of these issues without further examining the real nature of ‘lifelong’ learning drawn from Giddens’s analysis. The first reason that reflexive learning implied in Giddens’s view concerning identity is a ‘lifelong’ process seems to be that the external changes are *so fast* that one has to ‘continuously’ catch up with the run-away world. In order to survive in this rapid changing world, one has to learn to change oneself quickly for the sake of adaptation to external change. Thus, one aim of such lifelong learning is adaptation or flexibility. Hence, it is not difficult to understand why reflexive learning about being flexible is a ‘lifelong’ process. But the issue is: can we have a ‘flexible’ identity? Can we
rely on a person who has a ‘flexible’ identity, e.g., can we have a ‘flexible’ friend? The more critical question is: for whom do we really need to be flexible?

The second reason that the reflexive learning that is relevant to identity drawn from Giddens’s analysis contains ‘lifelong’ component seems to be that external changes are *endless*, thus an individual appears to be forced to learn to change him/herself ‘routinely’. However, since such reflexive learning that is relevant to identity is driven by self-actualisation, learners have to be responsible for the consequences of their learning. Consequently, such mode of lifelong learning could be seen as an endless burden to an individual over his/her lifetime. Some theorists have made critiques on this issue, as I have shown in chapter 2.

The third reason that reflexive learning for renewing one’s identity implied in Giddens’s analysis can be seen as a mode of ‘lifelong’ learning seems to relate to an assumption that the *only* response of an individual to external changes which are uncertain to one’s future should be *mastering* and *controlling*. What we need to realize here is that human ambition based on rationality that is used to control the natural and social environment seems to apply more radically to the human being him/herself, and now to the field of lifelong learning that is relevant to personal identity. The central aim of such reflexive learning appears to try to keep one’s future under control and/or maintain mastery of personal life over one’s lifespan. Hence, one key idea underpinning such lifelong learning seems to be an autonomous rationality for self-actualisation. Such mode of lifelong learning seeks to control and manage one’s life based on a calculable life-planning. However, this mode of lifelong learning seems to neglect the existence the un-calculable aspects of life and
forget the fact that contingency is also constitutive of human life. The more 
essential issue here perhaps is: do we only live our lives according to the 
dominant discourse of rationality, one of the cornerstones of modernity? The 
answer is obviously no, since a large number of counter-examples can 
immediately be given. The dominant language of rationality and modernity 
has excluded other moral languages that shape our identity.

From all these, we can see that what has emerged from Giddens’s analysis is a 
learning for the sake of external social change, which is problematic in many 
ways. This understanding of the learning and its implications for lifelong 
learning concerning identity are inadequate and in moral/ethical deficit if we 
simply associate learning concerning identity with Giddens’ sociological 
analysis on modernity and self.

6.7 Towards different views of learning in relation to personal identity

The immediate task I will perform is to present my views about the three 
issues relating to identity I mentioned above. More precisely, I will argue for 
how the notion of personal identity and roles of learning that are relevant to 
identity can be understood differently. I will do this by following Ricoeur and 
Taylor’s theories about identity. This is because what is significantly 
insufficient in Giddens’ view has been found to be copious in those two 
theories. I found that both Ricoeur and Taylor not only provide us with 
different views of personal identity, but also different views of reflexivity 
through which a larger space for the roles of learning can be analysed. These 
views of reflexivity are different from Giddens’s view in that these views cover 
such dimensions as conceptual constitution of personal identity, the influence 
of moral framework(s) and the inter-subjective relationship in the human 
world. What is significant in Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories is that they also
offer us a treasure trove of narrative theories and analysis of the relation of narrative to personal identity. It is again, in stark comparison with Giddens’s analysis, in this dimension, I found how we could see the necessity of narrative in relation to personal identity, learning and lifelong learning.

6.7.1 Are we what we make of ourselves or are we what we are?

To deal with this issue of personal identity, there is a need to re-examine the constitution of the concept of personal identity. I would argue that personal identity is not merely made, it is also partly ‘given’, and thus is identified, found, understood and maintained by a person himself/herself and by others. I follow Ricoeur and believe that ontologically, personal identity can be distinguished between identity as an entity, a thing, and identity as a mode of being of Dasein. This implies that personal identity as a ‘thing’ has its evolution – it ‘becomes’ and ‘develops’ on its own over time and some traits are permanent in time. It is in this respect, we can say one’s personal identity is ‘discovered’, ‘recognized’, ‘identified’ and ‘understood’ by oneself through reflexivity and by other persons through social interaction. Charles Taylor even defines his use of the term ‘identity’ in virtue of ‘finding one’s identity’ (Taylor 1985a, p.34, emph. added). Therefore, ‘what we are’ is inherently constitutive of personal identity.

Ricoeur’s conceptual analysis of personal identity through distinguishing two kinds of permanence in time reaches the conclusion that the conceptual constitution of personal identity should be understood both as identity as sameness (idem-identity), the thing, and identity as selfhood (ipse-identity), the being as Dasein. In the field of selfhood, there exists a dialectic relationship between the idem-identity and ipse-identity. On one pole of the dialectic relationship, ipse-identity is overlapped by idem-identity, which is expressed as
character; on the other pole of the dialectic relationship, *ipse*-identity departs from *idem*-identity and stands alone being identified as *self-constancy*. Character, which can be seen as ‘lasting dispositions’, is made up of both *habit*, which is a result of an evolitional interaction between sedimentation and innovation, and an *acquired identification*. The latter is a result of internalisation through the self’s interaction with *otherness*, including significant others, norms, morals, values, ideals, cultures, models and heroes and so forth. In this sense, the notion of ‘character’ entails the criss-cross of permanence in time in sameness and permanence in time through self-constancy. Within this dialectic framework, we can see personal identity in selfhood is not merely made. Firstly, this is because *habit* is not merely a result of innovation by the self. It is the result of overlapping of sedimentation and innovation. What implies here is that innovation is partly based on the self’s identification of itself and self-understanding of its sedimentation. Secondly, *character* as an *acquired identification* amounts to a certain existing framework of pure ‘identification-with’. Ricoeur argues, ‘Recognizing oneself in (e.g., certain moral frameworks) contributes recognizing oneself by (both oneself and others)’ (see Ricoeur 1992, p.121). Thirdly, personal identity as *self-constancy* amounts to the self’s maintenance of itself as a being in permanence in time in intersubjective relationship, which expresses both care of oneself (*Dasein*) and care of others. In all these senses, we are not merely what we make of ourselves, we are ‘what’ and ‘who’ we *are* at the same time.

However, in Giddens’ approach to self-identity, we can only see an amplified *ipse*-identity, corrosive *idem*-identity, and little self-constancy underpinned by imputations from others. It seems to be difficult to find two modes of permanence in time attached to the conception of personal identity in Giddens’s analysis. What I want to suggest is that the person who has a ‘flexible identity’
is hard to identify and/or re-identify as a same person and a constant being both by him/herself and by others. In the dialectic between sameness and selfhood, the subject might suffer from the problem that ‘I’ am ‘nothing’, if, as Ricoeur writes, ‘[a] self [is] deprived of the help of sameness’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.166). Here, Ricoeur provides a view to explain the ‘meaninglessness of personal identity’ at a conceptual level by showing the importance of identity as sameness.

What does Ricoeur’s conceptual analysis of personal identity suggest about the role of learning here? Firstly, Ricoeur’s analysis of the concept of personal identity provides a reflexive understanding of personal identity through the dialectic framework of constitution of personal identity. Such framework is a scale for ‘measuring’ by sense the ‘proportions’ of different constitutive part of personal identity. Given that there is a dialectic relationship between idem-identity (sameness) and ipse-identity (mineness, individuality) which can be mediated by narrative identity within selfhood, one can learn the degree of the stability of one’s personal identity by ‘sensing’ the proportion of the sameness of the self. One can also learn the degree of individuality of one’s personal identity by ‘sensing’ the proportion of their ipse-identity within the dialectic framework. Finally, one can learn to what extent one’s personal identity is imputed by others by ‘sensing’ the proportion of self-constancy.

Secondly, Ricoeur maintains that habit is the result of the interaction between sedimentation and innovation over time, where ipse is overlapped by idem; acquired identification is the process of internalisation of otherness over time, where ipse and idem accord with each other. All these analyses suggest that reinforcing, developing and innovating one’s character as part of ‘learning’ that is relevant to personal identity could be based on one’s reflection on the
parts of ‘sedimentation’ and ‘internalisation’ inherent in one’s personal identity. In other words, learning concerning one’s personal identity could be based on one’s identification and understanding of existing habit and acquired identification, in order to gain the senses of continuity, integrity and stability in personal identity. Following this, one’s learning to identify and understand one’s existing character can help an individual move in one’s lifetime coherently from ‘how I have become’ to ‘who I am now’ to ‘where I am going’. This is different from making personal identity simply for the sake of adaptation to ongoing changing society, which is likely to lead to fragmented and shifting personal identity.

As I will show, these two kinds of learning can only be facilitated by narrative. They can be seen as a kind of reflexive learning drawn from the dialectic of sameness and selfhood within the conceptual framework of personal identity. This mode of reflexive learning reinforces the stable constituents of identity by identifying the ‘sameness’ and ‘constancy’ of oneself, which is in contrast with ‘learning to be flexible’ or ‘learning as adapting’ which is implied in the idea of identity in ongoing need for renewal.

6.7.2 Is personal identity merely shaped by social impacts of the dynamics of modernity?

My view about this issue is that personal identity is not merely or primarily shaped by the dynamics of the institution of modernity. In the constitution of personal identity, external factors that impact on the self of a person cannot be restricted to the scope of social forces of modernity. This criticism might be unfair to Giddens, since his argument is primarily based on a sociological perspective. But my point is that, even from a sociological perspective, Giddens’s analyses still overestimates the impact of the institution of
modernity on the self and gives little space to the impact of other external factors. Giddens’ view of self-identity seems to be merely based on a self that is being radically shaped by social structure. Following this idea, the self is further assumed as a reflexive project of the self that is flexible for self-innovation and adaptation to social changes. What is significantly lacking in his view of reflexivity is morality and values. Although the link of the psychological dimension with modernity has been examined deeply in Giddens’s analysis, his discussion of moral and cultural influences on personal identity in the context of modernity is remarkably absent.

As can be seen from Ricoeur’s notion of acquired identifications, personal identity as character is partly gained through the self’s internalisation of the norms, ideals, values and cultures, rather than merely modern institutions. This approach to personal identity has been stressed in Charles Taylor’s theory of identity as I have discussed in chapter 4. Taylor sometimes uses the term ‘self-identity’ in his theory, but his notion of it can be largely equated with that of acquired identifications in Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity.

According to Taylor, the self exists in a ‘moral space’, and self-identity has (a) ‘moral assumption(s)’. The moral assumptions, implicit or explicit, are constituted by what he calls strong evaluations or qualitative distinctions. Strong evaluation is an evaluation of our desires in virtue of quality of life and the kind of being we wish to become (see 1985a, p.25). As Taylor writes, ‘To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary’ (Taylor 1989, p.28). The heart of Taylor’s theory of identity is that ‘[o]ur identity is defined by our fundamental [strong] evaluations’ (Taylor 1985a, p.34).
argues that, fundamentally, strong evaluation ‘plays the role of orienting us, of providing the frame within which things have meaning for us, by virtue of the qualitative distinctions it incorporates (Taylor 1989, p.30). In this sense, our identity can be seen as certain ‘moral framework(s)’, or the horizon ‘within which we know where we stand, and what meanings things have for us’ (ibid., p.29). Without or losing the moral framework, we will suffer what he calls disorientation or identity crisis. As he says, ‘[t]he condition of there being such a thing as an identity crisis is precisely that our identities define the space of qualitative distinctions within which we live and choose’ (ibid., p.30). Thus, Taylor claims, ‘Our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not. It is what makes possible these discriminations, including those which turn on strong evaluations’ (ibid.). This is why I think Giddens’s view that the making and remaking self-identity is conditional on lifestyle choices is problematic. This is because at the very least Taylor shows that the issue can be seen differently, i.e., it is largely our personal identity that helps us make choices about lifestyle.

As discussed above, identity as acquired identifications is fundamentally underpinned and shaped by morals and cultures, though modern institutions also shape our identity. But Taylor further argues that if one wants to live up to his strongly valued good, one can articulate his/her moral assumptions, i.e., the implicit or explicit moral space of questions – questions about self-concern as a mode of being in the world, through self-interpretation by using one’s language of his/her strong evaluation. This is because such articulations not only help an individual examine his/her life by following Socrates’ maxim, i.e., an unexamined life is not worth living, but also, more importantly in Taylor’s view, help one empower oneself to live up to one’s strongly valued good. As Taylor writes,
‘A formulation has power when it brings the source close, when it makes it plain and evident, in all its inherent force, its capacity to inspire our love, respect, or allegiance. An effective articulation releases this force, and this is how words have power (ibid., p.96).

Therefore, this articulation not only is an evaluative examination of the meaning of one’s moral/cultural identity, but also can be seen as a kind of empowerment. It is from here, narrative as a form of self-interpretation can be seen as a strong tool of articulation.

What can we see about the role of learning in Taylor’s theory (and partly in Ricoeur’s theory) here? It is not difficult to see that the role of learning lies in his notion of articulation about moral assumptions for a better understanding of one’s personal identity. ‘To give a certain articulation is to shape our sense of what we desire or what we hold important in a certain way’ (Taylor 1985a, p.36). By trying to articulate a certain moral framework, one is learning in the sense that one is reflecting, evaluating, shaping and interpreting oneself and one’s life by and within certain moral framework(s). In Taylor’s view, our articulation of its object (i.e., what we hold important), shapes this object, making it accessible and/or inaccessible in new ways (see ibid., p.38).

If we see ‘articulation’ as a learning process, then at the end of this process, we can say we have learned something. This is because, firstly, implicit assumptions can be turned into explicit ones; secondly, past life is examined and a new and deeper understanding of the meaning of life and of personal identity can possibly emerge; and thirdly, the learned/identified moral assumptions become a source of power enabling one to live up to his/her strongly valued good/moral sources. Such a mode of learning is not ‘driven’ by anxieties, but is moved by their valued ‘goods’. Thus, this learning is not the
learning as an adaptation in response to external power imposed on a person; rather, it is a mode of autonomous learning for the ‘good’ one strongly aspires to contact with. Again, such a mode of learning emerges from a different view of ‘reflexivity’ of a person compared with ‘reflexivity’ in Giddens’s view. It is a kind of ‘reflexivity’ that is conducted by and within certain moral framework(s) inherent in certain cultures, norms and values.

6.7.3 Is the ‘internal criteria’ the only criteria a person uses to guide the reflexivity in coping with his/her identity?

The reflexivity merely guided by ‘internal criteria’ in terms of one’s life and personal identity in Giddens’s analysis is morally limited and ethically deficient. As can be seen from Taylor’s theory, personal identity has its moral assumptions or frameworks. These moral frameworks are exactly the criteria an individual uses to define his/her identity. In Giddens’s analysis, the only moral framework underpinning one’s self-identity is ‘authenticity’ which is a main criterion within an individual’s internal referential system. Charles Taylor has shown that ‘authenticity’ is just one moral framework among a diversity of moral assumptions in the Western World over the past few centuries. Holding merely ‘authenticity’ as moral framework to cope with one’s identity, as Giddens himself has realized, involves being at risk of suffering ‘personal meaninglessness’ since ‘authenticity’ as internal criterion largely excludes ‘otherness’. But Taylor’s and Ricoeur’s theories provide us with different views about the referential system in understanding the notion of identity. According to Taylor, in the modern age of Western societies, identity might base itself on a diversity of moral and cultural frameworks as the result of pluralism (see Taylor 1989). This is because in our modern age there exist different moral frameworks, e.g., utilitarianism, altruism, hedonism, freedom, universal justice, rational agency, Christianity and so on. Therefore
each individual’s reflexivity that is relevant to one’s identity might refer to a
diversity of framework(s), rather than simply one framework like ‘authenticity’.

What needs to be clarified is that the reflexivity of the self which is guided by
internal criteria for mastery and control of the future life, without referring to
external criteria, is not the only reason that modern individual suffers so-called
‘personal meaninglessness’. If the sense of meaninglessness of the personal
identity does exist, it can also be seen from a different view. This
‘meaninglessness’ might also come from the conflicts of multiple moral and
cultural assumptions on which personal identity has already been based in the
age of pluralism. Taylor argues that the meaningfulness in personal identity
becomes an issue only when one’s moral assumptions and other different
moral assumptions are in controversy or in conflict. Following this view, in
Western societies today, communication between different moral and cultural
groups or individuals, resulting from international migrations and travelling
has vastly increased both in scale and frequency, when compared with a more
traditional age. This phenomenon, together with the collapse of the
authoritative traditional moral frameworks has produced controversies and
issues about moral assumptions at ethnic, cultural, moral and religious levels
in many communities more frequently than ever. Hence, this can be seen as a
different reason why identity becomes a problem today.

I have shown, Taylor asserts that one way to have or find one’s meaning of life
and identity is to articulate one’s moral assumption. Now we can see this can
be done not only in one moral assumption, but many. In the face of a plurality
of moral assumptions, Taylor firstly suggests that one way to deal with the
issue is to develop the capacity to invent the meaning for one’s identity by
combining different meanings of moral goods in a unique manner. Secondly, being open to plural and incompatible moral frameworks is another possible response to this issue. According to Taylor, taking a stance of openness in the face of rival or different moral frameworks/self-interpretations suggests re-evaluating our most fundamental formulations and what they were meant to articulate. This is to conduct what Taylor calls ‘radical re-evaluation’, that is, ‘the most basic terms, those in which other evaluations are carried on, are precisely what is in question’ (Taylor 1985a, p.40). ‘...it is a reflection about the self, its most fundamental issues and reflection which engages the self most wholly and deeply’ (ibid., p.42). What emerges from this reflection will be a ‘self-resolution’ for the self in question, a new definition of fundamental (strong) evaluations that are essential to one’s identity. Thirdly, arguing among different moral and cultural frameworks through practical reasoning can be considered as a way to resolve the issue of the moral plurality in Taylor’s mind. One can do this by arranging different goods and by ranking a plurality of goods in one’s life/life story through comparison so as to select a ‘superior’ one as one’s ‘hypergood’. 

According to Ricoeur, as I demonstrated in chapter 3, there exists the dialectic tension between oneself and others, in addition to the dialectic between idem and ipse. On the one hand, self is a being as self-concern; on the other hand, self is a being as care of others. From an ethical stance, Ricoeur argues that personal identity as self-constancy expresses a responsibility to others, e.g., keeping one’s own word given to others. This type of the personal identity is recognized in the way one responds to others. Self-constancy is underpinned by the imputations from others. In this sense others is constitutive of personal identity. Here, the criterion that the self reflexively refers to is the relationship between oneself and others. This criterion is more ethical than moral. Why?
Ricoeur has distinguished between the notion of ethics and morality. He defines term ‘ethics’ for personal conduct as an ‘aim of an accomplished life’ and defines the term ‘morality’ as ‘the articulation of this aim in norms’ (see Ricoeur 1992, p.170). He further defines ‘ethical intention’ as ‘aim at the “good life” with and for others, in just institutions’ (ibid., p.172, emph. added). Furthermore, Ricoeur argues that when weighing these two notions, morality is subordinate to ethics. Thus, the understanding of the identity of a person who wishes to achieve ‘an accomplished life’ or ‘good life’ with and for others is more ethical than moral.

In addition to these two dialectic relations in the notion of personal identity, there is the third dialectic relationship in Ricoeur’s notion of persona identity as I discussed in chapter 3, that is, the dialectic between sameness of the self and others. The first dialectic, i.e., the dialect between idem-identity and ipse-identity, is complementary to the dialectic of sameness of the self and others, because it is selfhood (ipse) that acts as a mediator between the sameness and others. On the one hand, to maintain one’s sameness, one might not change him/herself in order to meet the need of others or respond to the call from others; on the other hand, for the purpose of care of others, one might change his/her sameness, e.g., one’s certain habits might change for the sake of others. One’s final decision on this issue depends on the proportion of one’s preference for the selfhood and one’s preference for others in this dialectic scale.

Then, what can we see about the role of learning in these two theories here? From Taylor’s theories, one can see a different view of personal identity in the settings of modern age, that is, there might be various moral assumptions underpinning one’s personal identity. Firstly, this suggests that the act of ‘reflexivity’ about personal identity might be guided by and within many
external, moral criteria. Through one’s ‘reflexivity’ in relation to different moral frameworks, the meaning of one’s life and of one’s self-identity can be learned from his/her articulation of his/her multiple moral assumptions. Secondly, as Taylor suggests, leaning also lies in developing a capacity to invent the meaning of life or of personal identity by combining a multiple of moral assumptions in a unique way. Such an inventing capacity, however, is based on one’s ‘reflexivity’ between various moral assumptions. It is here that narrative takes an important role in learning about this capacity since narrative can offer unfolding stories with which to arrange and organize different goods over time in one’s life. Thirdly, a deep transformation in strong evaluation can be gained through a learning processes implied in radical re-evaluation. Through this learning process, new moral framework(s) that define personal identity can possibly emerge. Fourthly, the process of justifying certain moral frameworks for oneself among many moral and cultural interpretations suggests a kind of learning process. In this learning process, one can gain a different moral assumption through comparative argument by using practical reasoning.

From Ricoeur’s theory on identity as self-constancy, e.g. keeping one’s promise to others, one can see what Biesta calls ‘learning as responding’ (see Biesta 2006). What emerges form this mode of learning connected to identity is a reliable identity supported by one’s responsibility to others. Such mode of learning is conducted exactly through a mode of reflexivity in a person, a ‘reflexivity’ that is enframed in the dialectic between oneself and others. Finally, from the third dialectic in Ricoeur’s identity theory, i.e. the dialectic between sameness and others where self oscillates between the two, one can also identify a mode of reflexive learning. Such mode of learning mediates between maintaining sameness of the self and care of others.
CHAPTER 6

6.8 Leaning that is relevant to identity as lifelong learning: a critical synthesis of different views

6.8.1 A definition of learning

Learning is normally understood as acquisition, e.g., acquiring skills and knowledge, with respect to personal identity. Following what I have argued, however, I would like to define learning as a kind of reflexive learning in two dimensions, i.e., learning as developing one’s understanding of oneself and learning as reflecting on one’s responding to others and others’ responding. By ‘developing one’s understanding of oneself’, I do not mean making sense of oneself by isolating oneself from the external world. Rather one’s understanding of oneself is achieved by one’s linking oneself to the moral and cultural sources that have shaped one’s self implicitly and explicitly. An in-depth examination reveals that moral and cultural shape largely relies on one’s interaction with others, particularly significant others.

By ‘reflecting on one’s responding to others and others’ responding’, I mean one can learn to identify oneself through one’s reflection on both the way one responds to others and the way others respond to him/her. This is a mode of reflexive learning concerning one’s identity that emerges from intersubjective learning. I develop this definition by following Ricoeur’s notion of ‘imputation’ (Ricoeur 1992) and Biesta’s notion of ‘learning as responding’ (Biesta 2006). Biesta understands personal identity as a unique ‘being’ that is preconditioned by others: ‘what makes us into a unique, singular being – me, and not you – is precisely to be found in the way in which we respond to the others, to the question of the other, to the other as question’ (ibid., p.28). ‘Learning as responding’ is therefore the learning about how one responds to ‘what and who is other and different’ as a unique being ‘coming into world’ (see ibid.). Whereas I believe this idea is true, in my understanding, only when
we reflect on our implicit or explicit assumptions about/or our understanding of
our act of responding to others and reflect on ‘responses’ or ‘imputations’ given
by others to our very act of responding, can we say we identify a unique being
as ourselves. Without such reflections on the responses both given by
ourselves and imputed from others, both our responding and others’
responses might simply be regarded as intuitive behaviours.

As can be seen, both dimensions of my definition of learning are based on an
intersubjective relationship and are subject to such relationship. This is different
from reflexive learning as individualistic learning aimed at transforming oneself
continually in order to be adaptable and flexible to the external changes, which
puts the individual at risk of becoming demoralised. This situation comes
about because such individualistic learning seems not to involve ‘others’ and
external moral criteria that are in operation, but is only mobilized by ‘changes’.

As I will show in the following sections, what emerges from my analysis of
Ricoeur and Taylor’s theory of identity are two types of frameworks within
which four modes of reflexive learning can be conducted. The first type of
framework is the conceptual framework of three dialectical relationships, i.e.
between sameness and selfhood, between selfhood and otherness, between
sameness and others. The second type of framework is a (range of) moral
framework(s). Three modes of reflexive learning are inherent in the first type
of framework, and one mode of reflexive learning in the second type of
framework.

If we further link these modes of reflexive learning with the notion of lifelong
learning, what emerges from Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories of identity are new
views about reflexive learning as lifelong learning that is relevant to personal
identity. These new views of reflexive learning as lifelong learning are different from reflexive learning for ‘adaptation’ and/or ‘flexibility’ as lifelong learning implied in Giddens’s theory.

6.8.2 Reflexive learning in the dialectic between sameness and selfhood

The first mode of reflexive learning is a mode of learning through reflexivity which is not only concerned about bringing changes to personal identity, but also about maintaining and reinforcing the understanding of personal identity that has been found. This idea is based on the assumption that personal identity is still in a considerable part what we are or something ‘given’, as can be seen from Ricoeur’s and Taylor’s theory. This is so not only in a practical sense, e.g., our body, but also at a conceptual level, i.e., the notion of character. This mode of reflexive learning is important in that it suggests that an individual does not merely learn for ‘adaptation’, ‘transformation’ and ‘self-actualisation’ in respect of his or her personal identity. An individual also learns to discover and understand who he/she has been and is, and how he/she has become who he/she is in order to connect his/her ‘being’ in the future as a whole. Such a mode of reflexive learning, as I have suggested, is conducted within the dialectic framework between idem-identity and ipse-identity in Ricoeur’s conceptual framework of identity.

This mode of reflexive learning fits nicely into two categories of learning summarized in the work of Jarvis et al (2003, p.72): learning that reinforces the status quo (e.g. ‘maintenance learning’ in Botkin et al [1979]) and learning that allows for change (e.g. ‘innovative learning’ in Botkin et al [1979]). Interestingly, Jarvis’ notion of ‘reflective learning’ is included in both groups, because for Jarvis, ‘reflective learning does not automatically result in change’ (ibid., p.73). According to Jarvis, reflective learning is ‘the process of being
critical. This can mean thinking about the situation (and/or what is presented) and then deciding to accept or seek to change the situation. It can also involve accepting or seeking to change the information which has been presented’ (ibid., p.68, emph. added). Following this definition, our new mode of reflexive learning that is relevant to identity echoes Jarvis’ theory of reflective learning, because our first mode of reflexive learning can be seen as a process of thinking about and reflection on what is and has been presented about our personal identity, and then deciding to accept, maintain or seek to change our identity.

Jarvis’ notion of reflective learning can be seen further as a type of ‘experiential learning in everyday life’, and this confers a lifelong element to this first kind of reflexive learning.

‘Everyday life takes place in, and relates to, people’s social contexts. In the process of experiencing in all its modes, people learn – sometimes deliberately but often incidentally. Experiential learning in everyday life is synonymous with conscious living when we treat experience as a lifelong phenomenon’ (ibid., p.66).

Experiential learning may be further supported by the following argument: ‘...while many capabilities are developed in the crucible of experience, it is only with the ability to express understanding that we can call something learning’ (Polanyi 1967 quoted by Edwards et al. 2002, p.532, emph. added). This suggests the development of understanding plays a fundamental role in experiential learning as lifelong learning.

6.8.3 Reflexive learning in the dialectic between oneself and others

The second mode of reflexive learning that is relevant to personal identity entails ‘learning as responding’ emerging from intersubjective relationship in
the human world (Biesta 2006b, p.27). If personal identity is the ‘being’ as ‘presence’ of self-constancy as Ricoeur shows, then the notion of personal identity inherently entails the imputations from others, or we may say the self is also constituted by other than self. The self in this sense can be understood as oneself as another. Focusing on an individual’s presence as ‘uniqueness’, and ‘singularity’, Biesta takes a parallel view of personal identity as ‘being’ about a ‘self’ that is preconditioned by others. As he writes,

‘what makes us into a unique, singular being – me, and not you – is precisely to be found in the way in which we respond to the others, to the question of the other, to the other as question’ (Biesta 2006b, p.28).

‘Personal identity’ in this sense is not identity as a ‘thing’, but as a ‘being’ existing in an intersubjective world. Biesta writes, ‘Coming into the world is not something that individuals can do on their own. This is first of all for the obvious reason that in order to come into the world one needs a world, and this world is a world inhabited by others who are not like us’ (ibid., p.27). This ‘world’ can only be a social and intersubjective world. This is not least because the language and symbols used by individuals to have meanings are not his/her own possessions, but are shared by a language community (see Mead 1934; Taylor 1989, 1995b; Derrida 1998). Thus, personal identity as being, either as ‘being as self-constancy’, or as being ‘coming into world’, is ‘about responding to and therefore also being responsible for what and who is other’ (Biesta 2006, p. 28).

‘Learning as responding’ in the face of ‘what and who is other and different’ in a large part is a kind of reflexive learning conducted in Ricoeur’s dialectic framework between oneself and otherness. When we stop to think and reflect on how to respond to others and the differences, ‘learning as responding’
occurs. This comes about, because, as I have suggested in chapter 3, our responses to others contain both our ‘responsibility’ to others that they impute on us and our ‘sympathy’ derived from ‘oneself as another’, i.e., our evoked feeling that others need our responding without which they might suffer. It is in this double sense that learning as responding is a mode of reflexive learning.

Learning that is relevant to identity as responding to what and who is other and different is to learn how to come into the world as a unique being with constancy that others can count on. This kind of learning is fundamentally learning concerning ‘responsibility’ and ‘sympathy’ towards others. Such a mode of reflexive learning requires constancy and permanence in time, and hence is a kind of lifelong learning. From here, we can see self-constancy is not supported by the sameness, but by the responsibility and sympathy as a unique ‘being’ initiated by a ‘self’ through its self-persistence over time. This is in sharp contrast with the idea of identity as being ‘flexible’, which does not recognise the importance of self-constancy in terms of responsibility to others and the needs of others.

6.8.4 Reflexive learning in the dialectic between sameness and others
The third mode of reflexive leaning is a mode of learning that has emerged from the reflexivity in the dialectic of the sameness (of a person) and others. It is the ipse that mediates in this dialectic relationship. On the one hand, one may just maintain one’s character without caring too much of others, e.g., out of respect for one’s belief, one may not change their character underpinned by this belief in one’s response to the needs from others. On the other hand, one may learn to change one’s character for the sake of others, e.g., in the light of certain responsibilities to and sympathy with others, one learns to change one’s belief or give up his/her own habits. The third mode of learning can be
seen as a reflexive process of the self that mediates between the sameness of oneself and the care about others, so it is a mode of reflexive learning. The tension between the sameness of (a person) and others exists throughout one’s life; hence this reflexive learning that emerges from this dialectic relationship is a kind of lifelong learning.

6.8.5 Reflexive learning in moral frameworks

The fourth mode of reflexive learning is a mode of learning through reflexivity as a kind of self-evaluation. Following Taylor’s identity theory, a new mode of reflexive learning as articulation about one’s personal identity can be conducted within one moral framework or between different moral frameworks. I suggest this mode of learning should be called frameworks-aided evaluative learning. This kind of reflexive learning evokes certain analytical and critical capacities with which to engage with conflicts and changes between the self and the external world, rather than simply to revise oneself flexibly in order to adapt to the ongoing changing conditions of late modern settings. This reflexive learning aims to ‘move’ an individual towards the goods, rather than to be ‘driven’ by anxiety caused by the impact of social changes. This understanding of reflexive learning is or might be increasingly needed with the rise of conflicts between the self and society caused by changes and controversies brought by pluralism. This is because such reflexive learning can make an individual take a critical look at new problems as they emerge in his/her lives so that he/she can decide either to maintain their original position or seek to change.

A key part of this mode of reflexive learning is underpinned by Taylor’s notion of radical re-evaluation as I discussed in Section 6.7.3. This accords with what Edwards et al. argue in a paper on developing a theory of lifelong learning.
based on the notion of reflexivity as ‘metacognitive analysis and change of schema’ (Edwards et al. 2002, p.533). As they write,

‘Here consciousness transforms action because it produces reflective analysis of interpretative and evaluative schema routinely embodied in practice (Taylor 1989). This is the transformation of ‘habitus’, the re-formation of inherited schemata or structure of feeling, thought and belief through reflexivity that we view as crucial to a theory of lifelong learning’ (ibid., p.532).

Recognizing both ‘learning as the transformation of understanding, identity and agency’ and ‘learning as involving a developing awareness, which results in a growing understanding of customary practice, leading to reflexive social and self-questioning and the transformation of “habitus”’, they argue, ‘It is the development of reflexivity, the capacity to develop critical awareness of the assumptions that underlie practices, especially the meta-cognitive, interpretative schemata that constitute worlds, which we see as central to an adequate theory of lifelong learning’ (ibid., p.532-533).

As can be seen, these four modes of reflexive learning can be further classified into two dimensions of learning that is relevant to identity as I have just demonstrated. The first and fourth modes of reflexive learning can be classified into a dimension of learning as developing one’s understanding of oneself. The second mode of reflexive learning can be classified into the dimension of learning as reflecting on one’s responding to others and others’ responding. The third mode of reflexive learning can be seen as the learning spanning both dimensions of learning.
6.9 The need of narrative in lifelong learning in relation to personal identity

6.9.1 The role of narrative and lifelong learning in Giddens’s analysis of identity

Giddens claims that ‘[t]he reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems’ (Giddens 1991, p.5). Therefore, although Giddens contends that self-identity has become ‘the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography’ (ibid., p.53), he seems to emphasize that the need for narrative is simply because the changes of the self caused by modern institutional changes need to be coherently constructed with the external rapid changes in social circumstances. The reason to use narrative is that it has the capacity to construct a reasonably coherent life story against the vicissitudes of late modernity (see ibid., p.215). As Giddens writes, ‘[a] reflexively ordered narrative of self-identity provides the means of giving coherence to the finite lifespan, given changing external circumstances’ (ibid. emph. added). Thus, Giddens’s assumption of resorting to narrative in response to the problem of self-identity is limitedly confined to the impact of radical social/external changes on the self. For Giddens, the changes in the self resulted from changes externally imposed on the self need to be connected into a coherent life story by means of narrative construction.

This view of Giddens can be further seen from his analysis of the two main characteristics of a person who loses a stable sense of self-identity. Firstly, Giddens suggests that a person who loses a stable sense of self-identity may ‘lack a consistent feeling of biographical continuity’ (ibid., p.53), instead, ‘discontinuity in temporal experience is a basic feature of such sentiment’ (ibid.). In this feeling, temporal experiences become discrete moments that are
disconnected or unrelated in such a way that ‘no continuous “narrative” can be sustained’ (ibid.). Giddens then claims that ‘Anxiety about obliteration, of being engulfed, crushed or overwhelmed by externally impinging events, is frequently the correlate of such feelings’ (ibid.). Secondly, Giddens writes, ‘in an external environment full of changes, the person is obsessively preoccupied with apprehension of possible risks to his or her existence, and paralysed in terms of practical action’ (ibid.). Anxieties can be caused by an inability to block off the impinging dangers. These dangers can threaten an individual’s sense of integrity of the self or what Giddens calls the protective cocoon of the self (see ibid.). In short, Giddens analyses that because modern social changes make such a negative impact on the self, there is a serious lack of biographical continuity and integrity of the self. Hence a coherent narrative constructed by the individual him/herself is needed in order to have a stable and integrated sense of self-identity.

Although narrative is needed for the purpose of having a stable and coherent sense of self-identity in the changing circumstances, it could be argued that the role of narrative in Giddens’ view is too limited in virtue of narrative’s relationship to personal identity. This is firstly because the role of narrative in relation to self-identity in his view seems to predominately focus on narrative’s structural role. This is a role as constructing and reconstructing one’s biography/autobiography for a reasonable coherence of self-identity through which an individual can get a feeling that he/she is able to adapt him/herself flexibly to the rapid social changes. Over-stressing narrative’s structural role as constructing and revising self-identity might lead to a misunderstanding that identity is predominantly ‘constructed’ and ‘revised’. This view does not realize that narrative’s central role in relation to identity might largely lie in narrative’s interpretative role as ‘reflecting’, ‘discovering’ and ‘understanding’
the meaning of one’s identity through one’s (auto)biography. Secondly, why should the coherence of a narrative simply be focused on being ‘reasonable’? Are our life stories simply constructed in virtue of reason? This view largely downgrades and perhaps misplaces the role of narrative in relation to human lives and personal identity, because the organizing principle of narrative here seems centrally based on rationality. My third criticism is about how one’s wish for having a stable sense of self-identity can be sufficiently possible, if one continually and routinely makes changes through narrative construction to his/her (auto)biography simply for the sake of social changes. The moral, ethical and cultural dimensions of personal identity, which can be regarded as sources for finding a stable sense/meaning of identity are remarkably absent in Giddens’s analysis of narrative.

Following Giddens’s analysis, learning that is relevant to identity as (narrative) biography seems to be learning to develop a capacity to construct coherence and integrity of the self in the context of ongoing change, by means of narrative. Lifelong learning that is relevant to personal identity in relation to narrative seems to emerge from Giddens’s idea about ‘the capacity to keep a particular narrative going’ (ibid., p.54, emph. added). Following this understanding, learning to ‘keep a particular narrative going’ is learning to keep renewing oneself in order to adapt oneself to the rapidly changing world and ‘ward off’ the possible risks and this learning can only be realized by keeping revising one’s (narrative) biography. Therefore such learning needs to be conducted in continuous and lifelong ‘reflexivity’ for adaptation. It is in this sense that such learning is a ‘lifelong’ learning. But what kind of the lifelong learning is it? A lifelong leaning that simply subjects one’s biography to the external changes? A lifelong leaning that keeps one revising one’s biography according to those external changes? As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, it is in fact a kind
of lifelong learning for the sake of adaptation to changes, which has been shown to be problematic in many ways.

6.9.2 Alternative views of narrative in relation to identity and lifelong learning

Drawing on Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories of identity, as presented in my previous discussion, we discover that reflexive learning as lifelong learning is closely linked with narrative at many levels. This is because in their theories, the role of narrative is multifunctional in understanding the notion of identity, as I have demonstrated in chapter 5. Narrative cannot be simply regarded as a structural role in constructing a coherent self-identity in terms of adaptation to social changes. Rather, taking both structural and interpretative roles, narrative has the capacity to facilitate different types of learning in relation to personal identity. I will connect different functions of narrative to those types of learning. I will do this by referring to the roles of learning drawn from Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories of identity that I have previously discussed.

(1) The need of narrative in lifelong learning concerning personal identity at the conceptual level

First of all, Ricoeur’s conceptual analytic framework is a scale of measuring the ‘proportions’ of different modes of personal identity in selfhood, as I have demonstrated before. Because there is a dialectic relationship between idem- and ipse-identity within selfhood, one can measure by one’s own sense the proportion of the sameness of the self, the proportion of the singularity and the proportion of self-constancy of the personal identity. Thus, one can learn the degree of the stability of one’s personal identity by sensing the proportion of the sameness of the self, learn the degree of individuality of one’s identity by sensing the proportion of their ipse-identity and learn to what extent one’s
identity is imputed by others by sensing the proportion of self-constancy.

The learning concerning the proportion of constitutions of identity can only be carried out through narrative, because narrative with its mediating function offers a good response to the problematic of personal identity at a conceptual level.

In Ricoeur’s theory, narrative identity at a conceptual level, takes the role of the mediator between identity as sameness and identity as selfhood. Firstly, narrative as emplotment constitutes the specific model of the interconnection of events and this allows us to integrate the diversity, variability, discontinuity and instability with permanence in time. This art of composition is the configuration between discordance and concordance and can be termed as discordant concordance defined by the notion of synthesis of heterogeneous. This art is characteristic of all narrative composition. The dialectic between discordance and concordance includes the following pairs: between the manifold of events and the temporal unity of the story; between the disparate components of the action and the sequence of the story; and between pure succession of linear time and the unity of the temporal form. The correlation between narrative and identity of character for Ricoeur is that ‘characters… are themselves plots’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.143). Thus, through the identity of a unique story or a unique narrative, one can see the identity of the character, which is his/her narrative identity. Secondly, emplotment produces the internal dialectic of the character as a narrative category, which is clearly the dialectic of sameness and selfhood. There is a mode of dialectic internal to the character as a narrative category, which is the result of the dialectic of concordance and discordance developed by the emplotment of action. As Ricoeur writes,
‘...following the line of concordance, the character draws his or her singularity from the unity of a life considered as a temporal totality which is itself singular and distinguished from all others. Following the line of discordance, this temporal totality is threatened by the disruptive effect of the unforeseeable events that punctuate it (e.g. encounters, accidents, etc.)’ (ibid., p.147).

Given the concordant-discordant synthesis of the configuration of narrative, ‘the contingency of the event contributes to the necessity, retroactive so to speak, of the history of a life, to which is equated the identity of the character. Thus contingency is transmuted into fate’ (ibid., p.147). Identity of the character in a life story can only be understood in this internal dialectic.

When character as narrative identity is confronted with the search for permanence in time attached to the concept of personal identity, the internal dialectic of character (as a narrative category) needs to be inscribed in the interval between two poles of permanence in time i.e. between identity as sameness and identity as self-constancy. It is here we can see how character as narrative identity can mediate between these two poles of permanence in time. How? According to Ricoeur, narrative submits the identity of the character to what he calls imaginative variations. ‘...narrative does not merely tolerate these variations, it engenders them, seeks them out’ (ibid., p.148). In narrative, the space of variation open to the dialectic relation between sameness and selfhood is vast. At one end, the character in the story has a definite character (i.e., lasting dispositions) which is identifiable and re-identifiable as the same; at the other end, the character in the story ceases to have a definite character, exposing selfhood by taking away the aid of sameness or overwhelmingly imposing selfhood upon lasting dispositions. In the intermediary space of variations where narrative occupies, the identification of the same decreases without disappearing entirely by varying the relation between two meanings of
permanence in time through *thought experiments* reserved in narrative, e.g.,
literature, movies and life stories of others, etc., by referring to certain moral,
cultural and ethical dimensions as well as the social dimension.

Thus, we can see how our learning that is relevant to personal identity is
closely bound up with narrative. Firstly, through the *internal dialectic* of the
identity of the character in narrative, one can *learn* to understand how the
contingencies, e.g. accidents, chances and encounters, affect a personal life
history that can be regarded both as the unity and the singularity of his/her
personal identity. Secondly, *learning* about the constitution of one’s personal
identity can be conducted through one’s *imaginative variations* to which the
narrative submits the identity of the character, because imaginative variations
can be inscribed within the dialectic of identity as sameness and of identity as
selfhood. One can even further learn to balance the proportion of two modes of
identity by adjusting the *imaginative variations* offered by narrative.

Secondly, as I analysed before, Ricoeur’s theory of character suggests that
developing and innovating one’s character could be based on one’s work on
sedimentation and internalisation, that is, based on one’s identification and
understanding of existing habits and acquired identification for a sense of
integrity of personal identity. As Ricoeur explains, ‘…character has a history
which it has contracted’ (Ricoeur 1992., p.122). Similarly, Taylor contends that
‘In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we
have become and of where we are going’ (Taylor 1989, p.47). From this,
*learning* to identify and understand the character that one has already
possessed is significant not least because it makes it possible to construct one’s
personal identity coherently. Such kind of learning can be facilitated by
narrative, because the temporality inherent in personal identity can only be
presented through an unfolding story. As Ricoeur claims, ‘What sedimentation has contracted, narration can redeploy’ (Ricoeur 1992, p.122).

(2) The need of narrative in lifelong learning concerning personal identity on practical level

In relation to personal identity on a practical level, narrative takes a multifunctional role. As I have shown in my previous chapters, in Ricoeur’s theory, narrative takes on such roles as ‘imitation’, ‘reflection’ ‘interpretation’, ‘revelation’ and ‘transformation’ of life and personal identity. In Taylor’s theory, narrative takes on roles as ‘articulation’, ‘examination’ ‘interpretation’, ‘meaning making’ and ‘argumentation’ of life and identity. But to focus on the relation between learning and identity, I will examine the functions of narrative within the role of learning derived from Ricoeur and Taylor’s identity theories. Narrative plays essential roles in the following dimensions of learning in respect of personal identity.

(1) The role of learning lies in Taylor’s notion of *articulation* about moral assumptions upon which one’s personal identity as a moral identity is based. The role of such leaning can be facilitated by narrative. By trying to articulate certain moral framework(s), one is *learning* in the sense that one is *reflecting*, *evaluating* and *interpreting* oneself by and within certain moral framework(s). Learning as articulating according to Taylor relies on narrative. This is because, first of all, what is articulated is one’s moral space, and one’s place in ‘moral space’ *vis-à-vis* strongly valued good over time can only be understood through ‘an unfolding story’ (Taylor 1989, p.47). Therefore, narrative acts as a necessary condition for a better understanding of one’s moral identity. Second, articulating moral assumptions about personal identity is a kind of self-interpretation. Self-interpretation requires language; the language used in
narrative contains the language of ‘strong evaluations’ that are shaped by certain culture and norms. Thus, narrative is a strong tool for articulation of moral identity. Third, language empowers individuals to move towards strongly valued good. As Taylor says, ‘[w]ords may have power because they tap a source hitherto unknown or unfelt…or they may restore the power of an older source that we have lost contact with…Or they may have power in another way, by articulating our feelings or our story so as to bring us in contact with a source we have been longing for’ (ibid., p.97). Narrative as articulation in this sense empowers people to have a better understanding of themselves. Hence, learning as articulation needs narrative.

(2) Learning as developing of our self-understanding and meaning of our life can be facilitated by narrative’s capacity for meaning making. In Taylor’s view, in the age of pluralism, a modern person may not only discover the moral frameworks about his/her personal identity, but also invent a unique combination of different frameworks through narrative. However, not all modern persons can discover, identify and recognize a believable framework. Taylor suggests, ‘This might happen through personal inadequacy, but failure might also come from there being no ultimately believable framework’ (ibid., p.17). Thus, some modern people might be engaged in a quest for sense. Taylor asserts, ‘[w]e find the sense of life through articulating it. And moderns have become acutely aware of how much sense being there for us depends on our own powers of expression. Discovering here depends on, is interwoven with, inventing’ (ibid., p18, emph. added). He then concludes, ‘[M]ore and more, we moderns attain meaning in the first sense, when we do, though creating it in the second sense’ (ibid.) Thus, the meaning of one’s life and of one’s personal identity in the age of pluralism can be learned by developing a capacity to invent the meaning of life and construct personal identity by combining the plural moral
assumptions in a unique way, by using the power of expression.

If we see this act of combing as a capacity to produce learning in respect of the meaning of personal identity, then narrative takes a pivotal role in this capacity. This is because narrative as an unfolding life story is a privileged form of self-interpretations with which to arrange and organize different goods over one’s lifetime. If we accept Taylor’s claim that ‘[o]ur formulation about ourselves can alter what they are about’ (Taylor 1985a, p.101;1985b, p.26-7) and consider that a ‘power of expression’ should be developed in order to acquire a better or different sense of our identity, it is again only through the process of formulating a new narrative about ourselves that we can learn to improve our power of expression. Through the reconfiguration of narrative by using new and adequate expressions of feelings through refined languages/vocabularies of strong evaluations, we can then gain a new self-understanding of ourselves.

(3) Learning about the meaning of one’s identity through conducting arguments between different moral and cultural assumptions could also be seen as a learning process that is relevant to personal identity in our age. For Taylor, narrative is not merely about story ‘telling’, it is also about ‘showing’ the transition from one moral ‘position’ to another one through argument. He suggests this mode of argument is a process of practical reasoning (see Taylor 1995a). One is confident that position Y is superior to his/her former position X by comparing both self-interpretations, because he/she knows that he/she passed from one to the other via an ‘error-reducing move’. This ‘move’ can be gained through, for example, identification of contradiction, clarification of a confusion and realizing a neglected belief which is significant to him/her. Once position Y is accepted, it brings about a self-justifying transition. For Taylor,
this ‘error-reducing move’ is an epistemic gain (Taylor 1995a, p.225), a biographical transition. The argumentative dimension of narrative can also be seen as comparison between one’s self-interpretation and other interlocutors’ interpretations. This kind of learning, which is accomplished by way of argument and comparison through narrative, can be categorized into what I call ‘framework-aided evaluative learning’.

6.10 Conclusion
At the beginning of this final chapter, I have given a brief exploration of the emergence of lifelong learning with a particular focus on how it is related to questions about personal identity. Against this background, I wish to draw on what I have discussed in earlier sections of this work, to present six concluding remarks:

1. I have shown that implications for lifelong learning, drawn from a normative reading of Giddens’s sociological analyses of modernity and identity, display a certain degree of conceptual limitation and represent a moral and ethical deficit. I have also conducted a deep analysis of Giddens’s view of self-identity. His approach to identity is predominantly based on the interplay between the self with an active agency and the society, for adaptation to external social changes and for attaining the goal of self-actualisation. Although we do identify a personal singularity resulting from the achievement of the self as a reflexive project, we can hardly find two modes of permanence in time attached to the concept of identity, i.e. the identity as sameness and identity as self-constancy. Rather, we only see an identity of a self with an active agency that continually works and reworks on itself. Giddens also exaggerates the impact of the institutions of modernity on the self-identity, but he underestimates the importance of moral, cultural and ethical factors in the
2. The key implication for learning from Giddens’s analysis of self-identity is that learning to be an adaptable and flexible person through reflexivity in the social context of radical change is a necessity. This mode of reflexive learning is therefore learning as adapting and innovating. While such a mode of reflexive leaning might be necessary for personal survival and security in a changing environment, it is a mode of highly individualistic learning for the purpose of self-actualisation. Self-actualisation, which is guided only by a morality of ‘authenticity’ or ‘true desire’ to oneself, seems to ignore external criteria for the construction of the self. This individualistic learning might bring an endless burden and fatigue to the individual over lifetime, because ‘self-actualisation’ seems to require the individual him/herself to take full responsibility for such learning. Hence such learning has forgotten to resort to democratic effort to resolve privatised social problems. More importantly, such a mode of reflexive learning corrodes some good characters formed over long-term and stable norms. It undermines the identity as sameness for identification and re-identification by oneself and others, and ruins the identity as self-constancy in terms of responsibility and sympathy to others over time. So, besides democratic deficit, there is a remarkable moral/ethic deficit in this kind of reflexive learning. Finally, such a kind of reflexive learning is predominantly based on a modern discourse of autonomous rationality that directs individuals towards the mere purpose of mastery and control of one’s future with almost no tolerance towards contingencies that naturally impact on human life.

What emerges from earlier discussions is that such a mode of reflexive learning can be seen as a kind of ‘lifelong’ learning simply because it is a
learning for the sake of continual and routine adaptation to endless, rapid and uncertain social changes. Lifelong learning that is relevant to identity seems to become learning to be a flexible person in order to respond to those changes. This, as I have argued, might bring above-mentioned moral/ethical issues. The issues of lifelong learning that can be inferred from normative reading of Giddens’s analysis suggests that there is a need to develop different views of lifelong learning which is relevant to identity, particularly on moral, ethical and cultural levels, since all these aspects form a significant part of learning about one’s life and identity.

3. Although a normative reading of Giddens’s analysis of the notion of reflexivity in relation to identity in the field of lifelong learning is problematic, my view does not represent an absolute denial of the ‘worth’ of reflexivity. Rather, I think that learning which is relevant to ‘who we are’ inescapably relies on the notion of reflexivity first and foremost because the object of that learning is ‘oneself’, a person himself or herself. The fact that reflexivity is essential to such kind of learning is particularly the case when we try to learn about the meaning of our lives, about the continuity and constancy of the nature and kind of our existence in our world, and about our responsibility to others. All these are aspects of the learning that are relevant to personal identity. Nevertheless, I have particularly become aware that certain types of reflexivity bring about certain types of lifelong learning. In other words, reflexive learning needs to be conducted within proper frameworks if we hope to draw out proper views of lifelong learning. It is therefore important to find a different understanding of the notion of personal identity with different views of reflexivity, and investigate different roles of learning in those views, with particular attention to aspects of lifelong learning.
4. I have shown how personal identity and reflexivity can be understood differently. I have based these views on Ricoeur’s and Taylor’s theories of identity that I reconstructed in chapter 3 and chapter 4. I approached the notion of personal identity through an analysis of the nature of the concept of personal identity and by arguing for the need of personal identity for the person. I defined the notion of personal identity on a conceptual level by following Ricoeur’s conceptual analysis of personal identity. His analysis distinguishes between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity in his response to the paradoxes of the concept of personal identity in the history of Western philosophy. This analysis suggests that personal identity can be seen both as an ‘entity’, a ‘thing’, and as a ‘being’, the ‘existence of a person in the world’, a mode of being of *Dasein*.

Firstly, personal identity belongs to the category of a ‘thing’ in the sense that it denotes sameness of the person, which can be identified and re-identified by oneself and others.

Secondly, personal identity belongs to the category of ‘being’ because it is about the presence of our unique being over time at moral and ethical levels in the human world. In a moral sense, one is concerned with and needs to find and/or discover the ‘meaning’ of life in a ‘moral space’. Having and maintaining such a meaning allows us to define in our life what is important and what is not. Thus, this meaning of life decides the mode of life we want to live and kind of person we want to be in a human world, hence our identity. Without such meaning, we would feel disoriented in our life. By articulating such meaning, we could be empowered to live up to the goods we strongly value. Personal identity thus is a mode of ‘moral being’ that we concern ourselves with, which exists in the ‘moral space’ of the human world.
Identification and understanding of such a ‘moral being’ as same character of a person can be better gained through a history of a self that moves vis-à-vis one’s strongly valued good in the ‘moral space’.

In an ethical sense, personal identity is also about a mode of ‘ethical being’, because such a kind of being presents itself in the way he/she responds to others, and finds in the way others respond to him/her in the intersubjective world. For example, in the act of keeping one’s word to others, one can find a self that is accountable for this act to others and others can recognize an individual identity that they can count on. Identity as ‘being’ on an ethical level could be expressed in ‘self-constancy’, a persistence that the self exerts over itself through time. Self-constancy is important in terms of the need for personal identity, because it is concerned with the notion of ‘personhood’ in intersubjective relationship, that is, the quality or condition of being a person in relation to others on a metaphysical level, not simply the concept of a person without the elements of ‘others’ and/or a ‘person’ in a purely biological sense. I have come to regard all these understandings about the notion of personal identity as the theoretical rationale of this thesis.

5. What Ricoeur and Taylor’s theories imply are four modes of reflexive learning as lifelong learning. I conclude that firstly, lifelong learning concerning identity is not merely for self-actualisation, but it also reinforces understanding about ourselves and maintaining who we are. Secondly, there is also a mode of learning as responding, aiming at living in harmony with what and who is other and different. Thirdly, in the dialectic of sameness and others, lifelong learning that is relevant to identity is both about developing one’s self-understanding and about learning to respond to others. Fourthly, there is also a mode of lifelong learning aiming to articulate and evaluate oneself.
within and between certain moral and cultural frameworks that encapsulate the meaning of life, in order to direct oneself towards one’s strongly valued good, hence towards a clear and/or new sense of oneself.

6. The role of narrative in understanding the notion of identity is multiple and complex, but can be generally classified into a category of structural roles and a category of interpretative roles, which I have discussed in chapter 5. However, simply focusing on either a structural analysis or an interpretative analysis of narrative in understanding identity might lead to an insufficient understanding of identity. In Giddens’s analyses, social changes cause the changes in the self. Hence, in order to understand one’s self-identity, one needs to resort to narrative in order to organize the ‘vicissitudes’ between the self and social changes into a coherent unity. For Giddens, this is because narrative has the capacity to construct all these changes reasonably and coherently together. Lifelong learning implied in ‘keeping a particular narrative going’ is to serve the purpose of continually making oneself adaptable and flexible in a constantly and radically changing world. However, the role of narrative here is mainly confined to structural category in that Giddens’s analysis focuses on narrative’s capacity for constructing and reconstructing a life story by incorporating uncertainties of personal lives into a reasonably coherent unity. This largely excludes the interpretative roles of narrative in understanding identity. The language of modernity significantly marginalizes the moral, ethical, spiritual, cultural and historical languages and meanings inherent in narrative. This further restricts the roles of learning that is relevant to identity by way of narrative.

However, according to what I have argued for the views of identity and the roles of narrative in understanding identity based on Ricoeur’s and Taylor’s
work, the scope of learning concerning identity is vast and such kinds of learning can be largely facilitated by narrative. Clearly, the first mode of reflexive learning that mediated between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity can be carried out through one’s reflection on one’s narrative of one’s life. Although, the second mode of reflexive learning implied in the dialectic between oneself and others might be beyond the domain of narrative and might enter into the domain of ethics, the third mode of reflexive learning, i.e. learning that emerges from the dialectic between sameness and others, can be partly conducted through one’s narrative of his/her life. The fourth mode of reflexive learning emerging from articulation of one’s moral assumptions/frameworks by the language of strong evaluations largely relies on one’s narrative of one’s life in relation to one’s strongly valued good(s).

6.11 Final reflections

Finally, I wish to make some reflections on my reconstruction of the notion of personal identity and the roles of learning I uncovered in this thesis. Firstly, the notion of identity is a complex concept that can be examined through so many different approaches. As a concept, its constitution contains different dialectic relations and needs to be approached and understood on different conceptual dimensions.

Secondly, one’s reflexivity in relation to one’s identity conducted within certain frameworks can facilitate learning concerning questions about ‘what and who am I?’ Without being conscious of certain frameworks, it is hard to say that any ‘reflexive learning’ which is relevant to identity really occurs. It is exactly through the conceptual framework of personal identity developed from Ricoeur’s theory that the reflexivity in different dialectical dimensions of the concept of identity is conducted. In the same way, moral/ethical
understanding of identity is guided by one’s reflexivity in and within certain moral/ethical framework(s) of identity.

Thirdly, it should be noticed that the reflexivity that emerges from the two types of frameworks I argued for is not based on radical individualism driven by self-actualisation/self-realization or guided by internal criteria, e.g. authenticity. Rather the new mode of reflexivity is based on an intersubjective understanding of oneself. This mode of reflexivity is not only conducted in our dialogues with (significant) others from whom we internalise our moral sources, but also conducted in conversations with others who need us. Consequently, the new views of reflexive learning as lifelong learning suggests that learning that is relevant to personal identity is not merely a kind of learning for oneself as ‘individualistic’ learning, but more importantly, it is also a kind of learning concerning morality and ethics in relation to ‘others’, which is a mode of learning with and for others, conducted within intersubjective relations in human world.

Fourthly, in my view, investigating different views about reflexive learning that is relevant to personal identity as lifelong learning can be seen as an attempt to give a broader meaning to the notion of personal development in the field of lifelong learning which is dominated by the language of economic competition and individual employability that is underpinned by the current ideological agenda. I have shown that the approach to the notion of identity at least should not be dominated by sociological analysis, since the need and significance of personal identity is largely based on a person’s moral and ethical assumptions, and therefore must also be approached through a moral and/or ethical analysis. The theories and practices of lifelong learning relevant to personal identity as personal development therefore must not neglect the
truth that a living ‘person’ over their lifespan is not only a social being, but also a political, cultural, moral, spiritual and ethical being in the human world.

I should state that there might be some limitations and weakness in this research. To clarify any possible weaknesses is of great importance to further research in this area. Firstly, although one of my research aims is to clarify the complexity of the notion of identity, my approach to this notion is mainly philosophical. This approach is particularly based on certain Hermeneutic approaches to the notion of identity implied in two philosophers’ theories. This research is just one endeavour to show how identity can be understood differently through certain conceptual and moral/ethical perspectives.

Secondly, because my approach to identity is defined in terms of its conceptual nature and significance to the person on a conceptual level, the definition of identity in this thesis mainly displays conceptual constitutions and moral/ethical dimensions of identity. Consequently, some other equally important dimensions of identity are not given sufficient discussions. For example, I did not discuss the specific categories of identity, e.g., gender identity, social identity, national identity, community identity, etcetera. In terms of the significance of identity, I did not give an adequate discussion about the dimension of body as the symbol of one’s personal identity. Hence researches in other areas would be differently nuanced and emphasize different aspects of identity and raise different questions and problems.

Thirdly, because the theoretical rationale of my definition of identity is necessarily limited, the role of learning drawn from this theoretical understanding of identity is therefore a mode of learning that is applicable mainly to conceptual, moral and ethical domains of person identity. Learning
in terms of acquiring specific skills, information and knowledge in relation to one’s identity and how these modes of learning have impact on one’s identity are not discussed in this thesis. Given that learning as an acquisition of different domains of skills and knowledge might affect one’s sense of self, the relation between such modes of learning and identity could be an avenue of further research.

Despite of these limitations, the different understandings about identity that I argued for in this thesis could present a case for demonstrating the complexities of the notion of identity and how vast in scope learning connected with personal identity is. I hope the different views of reflexive learning that I drew from my argument will not only open some new discussions among those researching lifelong learning, but also provide some insights for policy makers in shaping new thinking about personal development for individual members of current societies. I also hope that this study is not only of help to lifelong learners in their reflections about their identities, but also helpful for lifelong educators who wish to guide learners to explore the question of ‘who am I’ for various reasons.


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