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## The Mimetic-Poetic Imagination: How Recent Neuroscientific and Cognitive Psychological Research Suggests a Narrativational-Developmental Approach to Identity

*Abstract:* This essay embarks upon an exploratory journey, a survey of the depths of the human mind from both an evolutionary and a developmental perspective, in search of the *human imagination as a function of the narrativational consciousness*. By way of examining the theories of Donald and Nelson, the human imagination is shown to be best defined in terms of *narrativity*. Narrativity describes the essential character of the human consciousness, and as such it has concrete effects on both anatomical brain structure and human culture. A neologism inspired by Paul Ricoeur, *mimesis-poesis*, is then introduced as a way to more definitively describe imagination in terms of this narrativity. This is followed by a brief preliminary overview as to how narrativity drives identity-development, and then by a suggestion as to why understanding this might be of benefit to religious educators.

Ever since Stephen Crites and others first alerted religious educators, theologians, and social scientists to the “narrative quality of experience,”<sup>1</sup> there has been an impulse among researchers within these various fields to better understand this uniquely human characteristic, that is at once intuitive and yet elusive to grasp. In the case of developmental psychology, the so-called “narrative turn” has in recent decades become mainstream within the field, even as its most prominent figures have primarily focused upon research over and against any attempts at a comprehensive theory of narrative development. Katherine Nelson’s *Young Minds in Social Worlds* (2007) is a notable exception.<sup>2</sup> In it she brings her own research, along with that of her peers, into conversation with the sweeping evolutionary psychological theory of Merlin Donald,<sup>3</sup> whose own work offers a resilient defense of the human consciousness—and by extension, the capacity for imagination—within evolutionary neuroscience.<sup>4</sup> In exploring both researchers’

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<sup>1</sup> See Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39/3, 291–311; republished in Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 65–88.

<sup>2</sup> Katherine Nelson, *Young Minds in Social Worlds: Experience, Meaning and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2007). Nelson describes the primary goal of her book as “the need to put *development* back into developmental psychology, where it has slipped away from much of the theorizing and empirical research of the field...” (*Young Minds*, 11, emphasis in text). She goes on to demonstrate the importance of narrative to her proposed developmental model.

<sup>3</sup> As portrayed first in Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1991), and later refined and expanded in Donald, *A Mind So Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness* (New York: Norton, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Many if not most neuroscientists tend to reduce brain studies to the finding of the regions of the brain that are responsible for specific functions (Donald, *Origins*, 361-363). This is elsewhere referred to as the localizationist

theories, the hope of the following pages is that doing so will yield insight into the so-called “narrativity” of life (the locus of human creativity) and what role it plays in human becoming.

## I. Gaining a Hybrid Mind: The Evolution/Development of the Creative Consciousness

Donald utilizes a historical, evolutionary lens in order to approach the depths of human consciousness in ways that cannot be measured in laboratories. Such an approach is not only more in-line with well-established evolutionary biological processes than his reductionist counterparts;<sup>5</sup> it also takes more seriously the inherently social and cultural character of human nature. Donald goes so far as to say that “our brains coevolved with culture and are specifically adapted for living in culture...”<sup>6</sup> and that culture, the creative product of consciousness, in turn actually shapes brain structures.<sup>7</sup> He thus describes brains dialectically, the “hybrid products of a brain-culture symbiosis.”<sup>8</sup> This ongoing dialectic is the very means by which humans have biologically evolved, a claim Donald supports with both archaeological and neurological evidence. Human evolution, he attempts to demonstrate, has always depended upon humankind’s ever-emergent creativity.<sup>9</sup>

Donald paints a picture of the human “hybrid mind,” that has undergone three major transitional phases within its evolutionary history. In each transition a new form of consciousness emerges, along with corresponding cognitive structural changes, as well as changes in social sharing and cultural outputs:

- The first transition, from *Episodic* to *Mimetic Culture* (between two million to 400 thousand years ago) marks the evolution from primate self-awareness and momentary event perception, to early hominid capacities for pre-linguistic, pre-symbolic social structures: mime, play, simple games, gesture, toolmaking, etc.<sup>10</sup> The self-awareness necessary to mimic others, and to consciously rehearse and model skills via aural and bodily expressions, is what makes these new forms of interaction and cultural expression possible;<sup>11</sup> it marks the beginning of non-sensation-dependent forms of memory, as well as the *possibility for genuine creativity*.<sup>12</sup>

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view of the brain, see e.g. Sophie A. de Beaune, “Technical Invention in the Palaeolithic: What If the Explanation Comes From the Cognitive and Neuropsychological Sciences?” in *Cognitive Archaeology and Human Evolution*, Sophie A. de Beaune, Frederick L Coolidge, and Thomas Wynn, eds. (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 2009), 10-11. Some go so far as to undermine, or dismiss altogether, the notion of a consciousness, as an illusory vestige of Cartesian dualism, an unnecessary complication of sensory-based human cognition (Donald calls these “hardliners”); see *A Mind So Rare*, 7, 28-45).

<sup>5</sup> Donald, *Origins*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> As quoted in Nelson, *Young Minds*, 237.

<sup>7</sup> Donald, *Origins*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> As quoted in Nelson, *Young Minds*, 267.

<sup>9</sup> It must be noted here that from a social-constructivist view, there is hardly any distinction between “imagination” and “creativity,” except to emphasize the internal aspects of the process with the former, whereas the latter term incorporates both the internal and external ends of the inseparable dialectic. The next section illuminates this near-equivalency further, by defining narrativity in terms of *mimesis-poiesis*.

<sup>10</sup> Donald, *A Mind so Rare*, 260; *Origins*, 193; see 198.

<sup>11</sup> Donald, *Origins*, 174.

<sup>12</sup> Neurologically speaking, there is evidence for a pre-linguistic “central mimetic controller” woven into the brain that integrates various thoughts, movements, feelings, etc. (Donald, *Origins*, 186.) Such activities are difficult to uncritically pin down to a specific brain region, see Donald, *Origins*, 186-196.

- The second transition, from *Mimetic* to *Mythic Culture* (between half a million years ago to the present) denotes how hominid mimetic event representation evolved into the uniquely human capacity for symbolic representation, enabling the onset of linguistic ability and the consequent arising of *narrative thought*, as well as new oral/bodily forms of creative cultural expression: languages, oral tradition, ritual, social myth sharing, etc.<sup>13</sup> Language, present in every culture, developed through social interactions, collective creative efforts towards discourse and symbols that would enable the construction and sharing of worlds that served to explain reality and make meaning out of life—i.e., myths.<sup>14</sup>
- The third transition from *Mythic* to *Theoretic Culture* (from the emergence of external symbols forty thousand years ago to the present)<sup>15</sup> is unique in that the structural shift is from internal to external symbolic memory storage—pictures, pictographs, written language, etc.<sup>16</sup> These cultural forms enable new external networks of personal and social memory to supplement biological memory, and the composition of narratives with even greater permanence and transferability between contexts than oral stories. It also led to the arrival of analytic and theoretical forms, such as arguments, taxonomies, verification systems, logic, measurement, etc., the culmination of all these being the employ of integrative *theories*, systems of thought with explanatory power.<sup>17</sup>

The evolution of the human’s prefrontal cortex through evolution, known as “encephalization,”<sup>18</sup> was therefore the process of the first two transitional shifts; these three layers (supplemented by a fourth, mostly external “layer”) together constitute Donald’s hybrid mind, a “mosaic structure of cognitive vestiges from earlier stages of human emergence.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Donald, *A Mind so Rare*, 260

<sup>14</sup> Donald, *Origins*, 213-216. Coordinated advancements in speech, auditory, and memory point to a “linguistic controller” system that integrates these mental structures (Donald, *Origins*, 259; see 236-267). Other researchers have suggested a link between the onset of ritualistic group behaviors and shared experiences, along with a sense of the spiritual, with an increased capacity for keeping attention and the advancement of working memory; see e.g. Matt J. Rossano, “The Archaeology of Consciousness,” in *Cognitive Archaeology and Human Evolution*, 30-34. Note that ritual is a cognitive and social advancement beyond rehearsal activities, that naturally involves mythologizing and other forms of story-telling.

<sup>15</sup> Donald, *Origins*, 276.

<sup>16</sup> Donald, *Origins*, 273.

<sup>17</sup> Donald, *Origins*, 273-274. These externalizations have had effects upon the modern human mind, namely in terms of how learning has become increasingly visual and literacy-based (since the written word became more ubiquitous in Western culture) and how memories are developed and stored as it works with “external symbolic storage” networks (see *Origins*, 312-314; 331). Yet while modern thought cannot be understood apart from this mind-culture interaction, these are not structural changes upon the mind, in the sense of a new cortical layer (the external quality of theoretic culture making such a layer unnecessary). It is philosophically, and even ethically, important that the culmination of the evolution of humanity-as-such is understood to be the mind’s capacity to explain the world and to share meanings with one another, and not in its capacity to theorize and systematize, or to read and write.

<sup>18</sup> Donald, *Origins*, 7. Cognitive archaeological research suggests that the evolutionary growth of the prefrontal cortex was correlated with increased analogical capacity and creativity, and that this in turn led to an increase in the capacities of the human memory; see de Beaune, “Technical Invention in the Palaeolithic,” 6-7; 12-14.

<sup>19</sup> Donald, *Origins*, 2; see 355-356.

Ancient layers continue to exist, and they enable new layers, even as these new layers incorporate earlier-gained capacities into higher-order functions.<sup>20</sup> It is this notion of “hybrid mind” that Katherine Nelson finds particularly concurrent with her narrative-centered, socioculturally-constructive views on human development.<sup>21</sup> Moreover she notes the striking resemblance between Donald’s proposed evolutionary process and the developmental patterns of early childhood. Thus Nelson was inspired to craft and research her own comprehensive theory of the emergence of consciousness, by which the hybrid mind is shown to develop according to a process that (as Nelson puts it) “weakly” recapitulates human evolution:<sup>22</sup>

- The first two levels of consciousness in development, *basic awareness* and *social*, correspond to the pre-mimetic, episodic culture in Donald that reaches its evolutionary peak in primates. Here the roots of social interactions are formed, eventually reaching a peak moment around the middle to late first year of life, when three-way interactions (between self, other, and object) and shared forms of attention become possible.<sup>23</sup>
- This shared attention enables the movement towards a third level, *cognitive* consciousness, marked by the onset of more intentional mimetic learning (like Donald), rehearsal activities that become the primary way the late infant/early toddler discovers the world.<sup>24</sup> Such repetition and rehearsal in turn enables the advancement in functional cognitive memory,<sup>25</sup> which allows early toddlers to form simple mimetic games, learn songs, and anticipate sequences of behavior routines. As the child thusly develops an inchoate sense of time, she or he learns to locate oneself within these “scripts,” leading to a fourth level of *reflective* consciousness. Self-reference and

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<sup>20</sup> This echoes Robert Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory; see *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1994). The main difference is that in Kegan, prior “orders” of consciousness are subsumed by the newest, most advanced order (like many “stage theories” in development), whereas here the layers of consciousness continue to exist in their more primitive shapes, and the mind can consequently be imagined as working along various trajectories simultaneously.

<sup>21</sup> Nelson, *Young Minds*, 23-24. Donald and Nelson’s dialectical and practical approach to development corresponds more so with social constructivist approaches à la Vygotsky, who viewed development as the two-sided process of externalization and internalization, than with Piaget (see Nelson, *Young Minds*, 51-53). Yet Nelson seeks to bring such a social-constructivist view into a kind of synthesis with neurologically-focused, “modular” views, and with recent attempts at an emerging theory of infant development (e.g. dynamic systems theory; see *Young Minds*, 82-84). She thus primarily situates her work in conversation with neo-Vygotskian “biocultural” approaches to developmental psychology, along with others, e.g., the comparative psychological approach of Tomasello (1999) that sought to describe the cultural origins of cognition (Nelson, *Young Minds*, 53-57).

<sup>22</sup> Nelson briefly recalls the embattled history of such “recapitulation” hypothesis in psychology, beginning with G. Stanley Hall (1904) and others, noting how thoroughly such theories were debunked by the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The notion of a “hybrid mind,” however, re-opens the door for a way to attempt to view this interconnection that many have intuited, as in it the developmental process can be viewed as overlapping and operating within multiple consciousness-levels simultaneously. Therefore Nelson can claim that an evolutionary pattern is evident in development without attempting to draw a strict parallel with evolution (Nelson, *Young Minds*, 48-50). This asymmetrical symmetry is in part why (as the reader should note) the bullet points below do not directly correspond to the prior three points regarding Donald.

<sup>23</sup> Nelson, *Young Minds*, 85. The social consciousness Nelson describes, when compared to Donald, would fall somewhere between a purely episodic and a more intentionally mimetic mode of consciousness. See n. 22.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson, *Young Minds*, 85-86.

<sup>25</sup> Here marks the beginning of explicit forms of memory, although such memories remain relatively short and require proximity to experience (see Nelson, *Young Minds*, 89).

representation here becomes more established, enacted scripts and scenes of action become more sophisticated and elaborate, and social awareness increases. Scripts and play, says Nelson, evince the ways that information is being stored—<sup>26</sup> i.e., according to experiences and repeated representations, linked together in temporal sequences. This expansion of “temporal capacity” (from momentary, proximate events to longer, more durable sequences) marks successive advancements in memory, and in turn, the rudimentary *imagination*,<sup>27</sup> since now events, objects, etc., can be intentionally represented in new circumstances.

- Even as oral language skills begin to emerge in the prior levels,<sup>28</sup> in Nelson’s view the full representational powers of language begin to materialize for the late toddler/young child, in the form of a budding *narrative* consciousness (akin to Donald’s mythic mind). Language mastery enables a child to begin making explicit reference to both the experienced physical world and its more abstract relations.<sup>29</sup> The child makes advances in “temporal” and “casual coherence,”<sup>30</sup> which are noted by the increased ability at this age (typically between three and five) to follow and tell stories and myths, to report activities, to plan for events, and to enter into dramatic, creative forms of social play.<sup>31</sup> A sense of the self-in-time, via autobiographical memory, takes shape through these activities.<sup>32</sup> This consciousness-form culminates with the so-called “inner narrator,” i.e., the ability to think in language—as well as, notably, with the ability to *imaginatively elaborate* upon the contents of memory.<sup>33</sup> Narrative consciousness is what paves the way for the child to enter into a *cultural* consciousness and into the wider public discourse Nelson calls (echoing Donald) the “community of minds.”<sup>34</sup> Herein lies the aim of Nelson’s book: to locate the roots of cultural awareness in the narrative identity development of early childhood, by which hybrid minds come to meaningfully and creatively participate in social-cultural life.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Nelson, *Young Minds*, 89.

<sup>27</sup> Central to Nelson’s view of memory is that “the basic function of memory is preparation and support for future action” (Nelson, *Young Minds*, 89), a dialectic negotiated by the consciousness—yet she notes that children at this age cannot yet transfer meanings and objects into new scripts, and have a limited sense of past which in turn limits their view of the future (*Young Minds*, 114-115). Representations are still limited to proximate contexts, the imaginative consciousness’ primary task being the ongoing expansion and integration of scripts and roles within social settings. This prepares the mind for the imaginative capacities that will come with the onset of narrative memory and consciousness.

<sup>28</sup> In Donald, mimetic culture enabled language; in Nelson, *pace* most developmental assumptions that root development in language (including herself) she prioritizes mimetic (i.e., social, relational) cognition, even as “oral language is slowly working its way into prominence in the becoming narrative period to follow” (Nelson, *Young Minds*, 88). Yet see also n. 22.

<sup>29</sup> Nelson, *Young Minds*, 151-152.

<sup>30</sup> These terms are attributed to Tillman Habermas and Susan Bluck; see “Getting a Life: The Emergence of the Life-Story in Adolescence,” *Psychological Bulletin* 126, 748-769. See Nelson, *Young Minds*, 154-157.

<sup>31</sup> Nelson, *Young Minds*, 149-153; see 177-178.

<sup>32</sup> Nelson, *Young Minds*, 184.

<sup>33</sup> Nelson, *Young Minds*, 206.

<sup>34</sup> Nelson, *Young Minds*, 210.

<sup>35</sup> Nelson, *Young Minds*, 237-238. While Nelson herself does not discuss this, it is this sense of cultural participation that continues to evolve and shape one’s sense of self, thereby enabling various forms of theoretic (meta-narrative) consciousness to emerge and make imaginative social-cultural contributions. This is the fundamental shape of adult learning/development, which continues throughout life.

## II. *Mimesis-Poesis*: The Narratival Shape of Consciousness Development

Donald and Nelson's combined perspectives yield three insights into how narrative serves as a hermeneutical key for understanding human consciousness, identity, and development. First, *narrative consciousness epitomizes human meaning-making*. For Donald, the evolution of mythic (narrative) culture corresponds with the arrival of *homo sapiens*, as the foremost mark of distinction from their hominid ancestors. Nelson highlights the role narrative consciousness plays in opening up the doors of society and culture to children, allowing them to participate and create within it.<sup>36</sup> Second, the advancement in evolution and development alike from mimetic rehearsal to narrative exchange, from a social constructivist view, appears to be a cognitive-cultural move from a lower (i.e., imitative) to a higher (i.e., creative) kind of imagination at work. This at least suggests that *imagination*, made manifest within an ongoing and productive sociocultural dialectic, *is the very means by which human meaning-making develops*. The lifelong, ever-evolving capacity for creativity can even be referred to as the *narrativity* of the mind, the expression of the inborn, pre-linguistic drive to narrate our lives.<sup>37</sup>

Third, the brain possesses an inherent *indivisibility and integration across modes of consciousness, a unity that narratives in particular seem to demonstrate, and even reinforce*. In a complex "hybrid mind," multiple systems of meaning-making exist simultaneously.<sup>38</sup> Evolutionarily and structurally speaking, vestigial brain systems continue to exist and exert influence—particularly the "episodic mind" as Donald called it, viewed structurally as the modern human brain's emotional and reactive functions that are largely centered within the limbic system.<sup>39</sup> Yet research shows the dramatic extent to which the cerebral cortex, the supposed center of human cognition,<sup>40</sup> also becomes activated in various ways by even the basest of emotions. Per Valerie Hardcastle, this suggests a two-way interrelationship between the hindbrain with which we are born, and the forebrain that continues to evolve in a sociocultural dialectic throughout life.<sup>41</sup> Narratives seem to both uncover and enhance this inherent emotion-

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<sup>36</sup> Nelson, *Young Minds*, 212; see 172-178.

<sup>37</sup> Jerome Bruner and many others have made similar claims regarding narrativity over the years. Per Bruner, "Narrative structure is even inherent in the praxis of social interaction before it achieves linguistic expression... [I]t is a 'push' to construct narrative that determines the order of priority in which grammatical forms are mastered by the young child." Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1990), 77. Donald and Nelson's theories echo this statement, as the mimetic mind and children's rehearsal activities are portrayed as both pre-linguistic and pre-narrative (as in, they provide the scripts that form the basis for narratives).

<sup>38</sup> Nelson, *Young Minds*, 23-24. Selfhood is a mixture of both conscious and unconscious processes, per Valerie Hardcastle, in *Constructing the Self* (Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2008), 106. Note also Donald's thesis that the "hybridity" of the mind is made manifest in its "external" as well as its "internal" components, i.e., the sociocultural web of symbols and relations, in dynamic interrelationship with the brain, respectively.

<sup>39</sup> See Hardcastle, *Constructing the Self*, 76-78.

<sup>40</sup> Recall that mimetic, mythic, and theoretic forms of mind-culture are the three transitional phases of encephalization, the evolution of the cortex, that is recapitulated (in an analogous way) in development. Mimetic and mythic systems dominate the cortex, each integrated within themselves via their central controlling mechanisms (Donald, *Origins*, 263-264; see 186-196; 261-267). The theoretic system involves what Donald calls the sociocultural networks of "external symbolic storage" that link up with biological memory systems (see Donald, *Origins*, 308-314).

<sup>41</sup> See Hardcastle, *Constructing the Self*, 78-82. Human frontal lobes are intricately interconnected with the thalamus, hypothalamus, and other parts of the limbic system. "Indeed, evolutionarily speaking, it appears that the cortex is really just overgrown hypothalamic tissue" (*Constructing the Self*, 57). Hardcastle thus hypothesizes, based

cognition interconnection: Psychoanalysts and narrative therapists have long demonstrated how stories help people connect (or re-connect) to deep feelings, thoughts, and memories that cannot otherwise be cognized or put to words. Hardcastle reviews narrative psychologists' research showing the high level of importance of narrative sharing for the identity development of children, emphasizing that story-sharing is our natural "way of caring about ourselves and others. It is a way of *integrating and consolidating our affective reactions to the events around us*, a way of making our life events meaningful, to us and to others."<sup>42</sup>

In light of this review, the primary suggestion of this paper is that the human consciousness, through the course of evolutionary history and of human development alike, appears to have a decidedly narrational shape throughout. Narrative consciousness marks a certain crescendo in imagination's power and plays a pivotal role in a person's identity-formation, but it remains only one layer within a multilayered consciousness. Yet there is also what can be rightly called the *narrativity of the consciousness*, which cuts across the entire consciousness spectrum, and is the driving force behind the development of each layer. The concept of narrativity offers a way to better understand the lifelong quest to make sense out of lived existence, the uniquely human lifelong pursuit to make life "object," in the sense that Robert Kegan uses the term.<sup>43</sup> As Hardcastle emphasizes, this is not just a quest to simply understand oneself or the world, but to actually creatively foster one's interrelatedness within it. Every person naturally seeks to nurture one's own sense of agency, one's sense of belonging in community;<sup>44</sup> every person eventually attempts to locate oneself in the world and in time, and ultimately, to imaginatively anticipate the future and to act according to a sense of purpose. Every achievement of human culture, as well as that of the developing child (and the ongoing evolution of the learning adult), can be traced back to these longings,<sup>45</sup> summarized by the great existential question "Who am I?" that can only be answered (even if partially and incompletely) through stories. It is in this narrativity of the

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on research and anecdotal evidence, that the "battle" in neuroscience between "cognitive appraisal-like theories" that emphasize cognitive-affective unity, and "basic emotion reductive theorists" who prioritize brain localization and physiological responses is a false one. That is, humans have hard-wired emotional responses, *and* emotions can mature and evolve (and take on culturally-specific and personal flavors) over time; these are not mutually exclusive realities (*Constructing the Self*, 83-84; see also de Beaune, "Technical Invention in the Palaeolithic, 12-13).

<sup>42</sup> Hardcastle, *Constructing the Self*, 62-63 (emphasis added). This view is supported by one of the most comprehensive works on the subject of neurological emotional development, Allen Schore's *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994). Schore demonstrates how emotional regulation (i.e., an infant/toddler's ability to manage the continuous onslaught of sensory-emotional data) is a product of "the experience-dependent development of the corticolimbic system" (66), a neural network interconnecting the forebrain and hindbrain.

<sup>43</sup> Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 32-33.

<sup>44</sup> David Bakan described these first two as the twin yearnings for communion and agency which constitute "the duality of human experience"; see *The Duality of Human Experience* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966). As Robert Kegan elaborates, these are "the yearning to be included, to be a part of, close to, joined with, to be held, admitted, accompanied" and "the yearning...to experience one's distinctness, the self-chosenness of one's directions, one's individual integrity." Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1982), 107.

<sup>45</sup> I summarize these longings as agency, communion (following Bakan; see n.44), spatiotemporal location, and purpose. In the first chapter of my forthcoming dissertation (its main title: *Making Disciples, Constructing Selves*) I argue that these four dimensions all imply questions that are demonstrably narrational in nature, and further, all four play identifiable roles in the social-dialectical meaning-making that drives human learning and development from the start. Therefore they imply a "narrativity" endemic to development, which is driven by the search for meaning.

consciousness, moreover, that the imaginative-creative capacities of humans are located. Imagination is a fundamental quality of human identity.

The inherent mystery of the consciousness remains.<sup>46</sup> We can, however, continue to press further into understanding the narrativity of consciousness, as that which makes humans creators of culture, who are created by culture. A recently-published article,<sup>47</sup> first written over two years ago, marked one of my first overt attempts to explore the nature of human narrativity, by beginning with Paul Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutics and his approach to narrative identity, and then correlating it with the constructive developmental theory of Kegan. By way of concluding this present excursion into the consciousness, Ricoeur once again becomes helpful for viewing more precisely *how* all human consciousness has a narrational shape.

Every act of meaning-making for Ricoeur involves what Aristotle called *mimesis praxeos*, the *creative imitation of action*.<sup>48</sup> Note the difference in the definition of *mimesis* as opposed to Donald: For Ricoeur every act of imitation is inherently a *poesis*, an act of creativity. There is no "pure" imagination or novelty apart from any historical or social influence,<sup>49</sup> as any social constructivist would concur. But neither is there any "pure" imitation apart from some form of creative interpretation—either in the form of what Ricoeur calls a *configuration*, where past and present elements are re-presented in novel ways and in novel contexts, or of a *refiguration*, where such a re-presentation intersects with the lived experience of an observer or listener and thus exerts its own influence within the cultural consciousness.<sup>50</sup> I therefore use the hyphenated term *mimesis-poesis*<sup>51</sup> to capture Ricoeur's intention, so as to prevent confusion regarding the word *mimesis*, and also to emphasize *the simultaneous and singular presence of both imagination and imitation in every act of social meaning-making*.

Neurologically speaking, *mimesis-poesis* corresponds with the insight of Hofstadter and Sander that every act of human meaning-making is essentially *analogical*, and that "what we typically call 'flexibility' or 'creativity' is the human faculty of extending categories and making

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<sup>46</sup> Metabolic imaging demonstrates that consciousness is related to (if not directly correlated with) the electric impulses of the brain, and that this mental activity (prompted by social-cultural stimuli and the senses) has definitive material effects upon grey matter—as Donald describes it, like a computer that, in the course of being used, adjusts itself by rewriting its own hardware. But as he goes on to say, "brain activity is the end of the line" (Donald, *A Mind so Rare*, 177-178); consciousness *itself* can never be directly observed by science.

<sup>47</sup> Joshua Lunde-Whitler, "Paul Ricoeur and Robert Kegan in Unlikely Dialogue: Towards a 'Narrative-Developmental' Approach to Human Identity and Its Value for Christian Religious Education." *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 19/1, 2015, 1-25.

<sup>48</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), 34; 45.

<sup>49</sup> "The work of the imagination does not come from nowhere." Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 25.

<sup>50</sup> These are the two key moves within Ricoeur's threefold narrative hermeneutic (a "triple mimesis"); for a detailed explanation of the entire process see Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, 45-51; 52-87.

<sup>51</sup> Typically *mimesis* is related to *praxis*, and *muthos* to *poesis*—but Ricoeur's intention, in *Time and Narrative* in particular, is to demonstrate the interrelatedness of these two sets: Every imitation of action has a creative element to it; every myth or story must have demonstrable reference to lived experience. History and fiction, says Ricoeur, are therefore neither equated with each other (*a la* Hayden White) or wholly separated (as implied by Alasdair MacIntyre); see Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), 158-159. Rather they are two ends of a continuum, their interrelationship indicating the narrational character of meaning-making by which time is humanized (see *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, 77-82).

leaps between them.”<sup>52</sup> Sophie A. de Beaune similarly views analogical reasoning as a primary clue to the emergence of human/hominid forms of cognition and memory in evolution.<sup>53</sup> But the term “analogy,” or the related “metaphor,”<sup>54</sup> does not capture *the inherently historical and temporal* aspect of the memory, nor the *emotional* contents that are so pivotal to memory’s durability and influence upon cognition, both of which are dimensions of human meaning-making-as-narrativity. Analogical “leaps” are made using symbols and concepts, precisely *because* of those symbols and concepts’ varying degrees of reference to lived and/or narrated experience encoded in memory; in other words, analogies are analogies only to the extent that they draw upon one’s life-stories, and/or the emotions that undergird them.<sup>55</sup> The most powerful analogic symbols have a metonymic quality to them, by which they open up a lived or remembered story or stories, as an interruption of consciousness—leading to either a more “mimetic” re-treading of the past (e.g. reliving a trauma), or a powerful, more “poetic” interweaving of past and present that shines light upon the future (e.g. how Metz conceived the “dangerous memories” of Judeo-Christian faith as opening up eschatological hope).<sup>56</sup>

### III. Imagination in Narrativ-Development: An Overview and a Suggestion

There is far more to say here than space permits. Yet by way of a conclusion I suggest that it is this narrativ, mimetic-poetic imagination that not only activates the consciousness but also stretches it beyond its presumed temporal limits, and is therefore the means by which narrative identity develops throughout the lifespan. Momentary sensations and base emotions (episodic consciousness) gain meaning first from highly mimetic, and then increasingly poetic, social cues from caregivers, which form the basis for pre-linguistic proto-conversations. These open up the opportunity for shared attention and the imitation of named/remembered objects, people, events, etc.; as these elemental interpretants (Peirce) are practiced and therefore remembered within lived contexts, they begin to imitate their order, placement, and temporal sequence as experienced, via rehearsal activities and re-enactments of scripts (i.e., mimetic consciousness). As these become more imaginative, the memory of a script becoming strong enough so as to make it object or import it into new contexts, a child now aided by language begins to inchoately discern, and then imitate, things such as style, form for beginnings and ends, temporal/causal organization, and narrativ evaluation.<sup>57</sup> These are socially-learned cues that help to tie a litany

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<sup>52</sup> Hofstadter, Douglas and Sander, Emmanuel. *Surfaces and Essences: Analogy as the Fuel and Fire of Thinking* (New York: BasicBooks, 2013), 186.

<sup>53</sup> de Beaune, “Technical Invention in the Palaeolithic,” 6-10.

<sup>54</sup> Ricoeur in his earlier works discusses symbol and metaphor; e.g. *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (Toronto: University Press, 1977). In the preface of his subsequent *Time and Narrative* (Vol. 1., ix-xi), he explains how metaphor and narrative are bound up with each other to the extent that both constitute “one vast poetic sphere” (xi). From my narrativ-developmental view, I suggest metaphorical language to be a pre-narrative form of mimetic-poetic meaning-making, that either works with narrative or tries to dive beneath the narrative consciousness to evoke pre-narrative emotions and senses (e.g. as in poetry).

<sup>55</sup> That is, the storied quality of human meaning and memory precedes the symbolic (corresponding with Donald), not the other way around where symbols and concepts are viewed as the building-blocks of narratives (à la Piaget and implicit in much of cognitive psychological theory and research).

<sup>56</sup> Metz, Johann Baptist. *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. ed. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad / Herder & Herder, 2007), 169.

<sup>57</sup> William Labov’s view of narrative and consequent research emphasizes the importance of these elements, most famously evaluation, in acts of life-narration; see e.g. *The Language of Life and Death: The Transformation of Experience in Oral Narrative* (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 2013), 5; see 5-7.

of sundry (cognitive, emotional, social-cultural) meanings into a whole, a plot-unit that can be both shared and remembered. Such ever-evolving stories form the prefigured (Ricoeur) web of historical and fictive meanings by which one can imaginatively, as Richard Kearney says, “recreate worlds as possible worlds,”<sup>58</sup> thereby amplifying or refining lived narrative meanings, or launching those meanings towards new, future trajectories.

In other words, consciousness evolves in pre-narrative, proto-narrative, and narrative ways, all of which build upon each other, all of which continue to exist independently of the others throughout life, and all of which evolve in a narrational (mimetic-poetic) way, indicating the innate human drive to tell stories and thus to make meaning out of life. And while it is not the focus of this paper, this so-called “narrational-developmental” process also applies to adolescent and adult development, to the ongoing quest of becoming the narrator of one’s own life (as articulated in the work of Dan McAdams et al.), as well as to that of contending with and negotiating between the “polyphonic” (M. Bakhtin) narratives of mind-culture. That is, consciousness is also “meta-narrative” and “trans-narrative” (corresponding in part with Donald’s theoretic culture, the mind intertwined with external memory fields).<sup>59</sup> Thus human creativity, as narrativity, can be viewed as the basic unit of evolution and of lifelong development alike.

To simply offer one among many possible points of practical reflection here for religious educators: The claim of Maria Harris that imagination is at the heart of religious education<sup>60</sup> is modified here, to suggest that the nurture of narrativity, the innate drive to mimetically-poetically narrate life and give meaning to lived existence, is at the heart of what it educate in faith.<sup>61</sup> Dialogical story-sharing epitomizes this, where the so-called dangerous narratives (Metz) of the faith tradition are recalled, which then mimetically-poetically elicit new personal stories, that consequently mimetically-poetically elaborate and expand upon each other in continual reference to faith-stories. Many helpful pedagogical models in religious education suggest this basic “story-sharing” way of being,<sup>62</sup> but it must be remembered that there is ultimately an inherent irreducibility to the mimetic-poetic imagination within every individual person. No model or curriculum will fit the pedagogical/developmental needs of every person at every moment. Yet story-sharing serves as a good place for educators to start, as the narrative consciousness, the apex of human meaning-making as Donald and Nelson suggest, serves as a conduit to the rest of the hybrid mind, in its various pre-narrative and meta-narrative forms. The goal for religious educators, then, is to encourage kinds of story-sharing (about faith and life) that offers multiple entry points for the imagination, and then to foster the telling of new life-

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<sup>58</sup> Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 131-132.

<sup>59</sup> In the aforementioned “Ricoeur and Kegan in Unlikely Dialogue” (n.47), I suggest such consciousness layers (summarized as proto-narrative, narrative, and meta-narrative) as a re-interpretation of Kegan’s orders of consciousness; the five consciousness-modes presented here (pre-narrative, proto-narrative, narrative, meta-narrative, trans-narrative) even more closely resemble Kegan (see *In Over Our Heads*, 314-315; Fig. 9.1).

<sup>60</sup> Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 6.

<sup>61</sup> James Loder spoke of this as the “inner logic” to the human spirit, “its creative drive to construct coherence and remain open to ultimacy, its irrepressible self-transcendence and transformational potential, its revulsion at confusion and its discovery of order in chaos...” Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 9-10.

<sup>62</sup> E.g., Thomas Groome’s shared praxis model, specifically its second, third, and fourth movements (see *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 188-197; 211-220).

stories that display some sort of life-giving mimetic-poetic move, drawing upon either pre-narrative or meta-narrative meanings. Future research and reflection will be necessary to elaborate upon this claim further.

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