

## Narrative Unity, Autonomy, and Ethical Earnestness:

### A Response to Lippitt

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#### **Abstract**

In connecting Kierkegaard with virtue ethics, several authors have recently argued that narrative models of selves and MacIntyre's concept of the unity of a life help make sense of Kierkegaard's existential stages. But there are difficult questions raised by John Lippitt and others about the metaphysics of 'narrative' and about how narrative connection is formed by an agent living her life. I defend Anthony Rudd's response that a basic narrative connection is essential to the intelligibility of free rational agency; I also argue that this constitutive narrative is prereflective and prior to stories one tells oneself or others about oneself. But there are higher levels of unity or narrative structure that result from the volitional effort and more reflective choices that agents make. At these levels, narrative unity is directly connected with the conditions of personal autonomy, wholeheartedness, and an ethical framework for caring. This explanation shows, *pace* Lippitt, that Kierkegaard's distinction between "aesthetic" and "ethical" attitudes or stances is manifested in the deeper sorts of narrative integration achieved in ethical wholeheartedness.

#### **I. Introduction: New Problems about Narrative and the Aesthetic-Ethical Distinction**

In several recent articles, John Lippitt has raised hard and important questions about the notions that human selves have a "narrative" structure and that the natural development of our capacity for robust selves (including autonomy, authenticity, and even ethical maturity) involves achieving "narrative unity" in the stories that we are.<sup>1</sup> His questions intersect with, and make subtler, other critiques of narrative models raised in the wider and growing literature on this topic in the last decade. Lippitt forces us to reconsider claims that Anthony Rudd, I, and others made in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre* that (a) MacIntyre's famous account of the narrative unity as part of the telos of human life<sup>2</sup> sheds light on Kierkegaard's conception of selfhood, and (b) that insights from Kierkegaard can help us develop and defend such a narrative model. Can we still say that movement between Kierkegaard's existential "stages" of life -- in particular from the "aesthetic" to the "ethical" stance -- is illuminated by the idea of increasing narrative unity?

In two recent essays, Anthony Rudd has already addressed several of these objections by Lippitt and other critics of narrative identity theory in the mainstream literature.<sup>3</sup> My goal in this paper is to build on Rudd's work in two ways. The first is to isolate an ontological objection to MacIntyre's narrative account of self-identity and action that requires an explicitly ontological response. I outline a version of what we might call *realism* about life-narratives (or practical identities as narrative-like structures) as opposed to various types of constructivism, and show how such a realist account allows us to address Lippitt's most searching criticisms.<sup>4</sup> My second task is to show that on this basis, we can distinguish and defend further levels of narrative unity

that are directly connected with autonomy, identity-shaping commitments, and ethical norms that must inform caring on Kierkegaard's view. In particular, I argue that the complex distinction between "the ethical" attitude and all varieties of "aestheticism" does involve more robust sorts of narrative unity, such as the "wholeheartedness" that is essential to mature agency. Thus, while my analysis will ultimately show how narrative concepts illuminate Kierkegaard's distinctions, much of my response to Lippitt concerns autonomous identity in general. As I develop a robust narrative conception through a series of theses, certain distinctively Kierkegaardian positions fit into this conception as natural extensions that make even stronger claims. Yet none of these claims, I contend, are refuted by Lippitt's arguments that strong narrative unity will close us off from novelty or the diversity of values worth appreciating in life.

**Practical Identity as the Issue.** There are several important challenges raised by Lippitt and other critics of narrative unity, and it will help to begin with a brief taxonomy of them. In summarizing these concerns, I will assume agreement that the "unity" under dispute is something more than the unity of "apperception" in Kant's sense, i.e. the unity of a single consciousness that can reidentify itself over time as the same consciousness that experienced other events in past times. When "personal identity" is understood in this theoretical sense, the question of its criterion asks whether identity over time is secured by a suitable set of relations among the *contents* of consciousness, as Lockeans have held, or by the endurance of a distinct something that *contains* the conscious experiences (e.g. a substance that has these experiences) as the heirs of Leibniz have held, or whether there is some third alternative (e.g. as Kant and his heirs have sought).<sup>5</sup> Some narrative accounts of personal identity, such as Dennett's and Flanagan's, seem to be offered largely as answers to this theoretical question about the unity of consciousness over time, which obviously intersects with difficult issues in the philosophy of mind.<sup>6</sup> Other anti-narrative accounts, such as Derek Parfit's famous argument against nonreductive and nonscalar identity, also seem to be directed at the theoretical question about what makes something the "same consciousness" earlier and later<sup>7</sup> -- though with the added assumption that answering this question will be enough to resolve fundamental ethical problems (e.g. is the "separateness of persons" of intrinsic importance in the content of moral obligations?).

Thus Bernard Williams was subtly changing the topic when he argued against Parfit that our basic interest in our future (including possible changes in our character and life-goals in particular) is explained by the practical authority that our present "ground projects" and our other commitments have in giving us reasons to go on living.<sup>8</sup> The priority of our present commitments indicates that a tendency to self-perpetuation is essential to their status as commitments. Or we could say that Williams was responding to an ambiguity in Parfit's account that allowed him to distinguish what has come to be called my "practical identity," which involves my sense what I care about, what I'm doing in light of these cares, how my devotions formed, and what values they respond to. Identity in this sense involves more than temporal unity of consciousness: it also includes the practical conditions for moral responsibility, and perhaps the conditions of personal autonomy or responsibility for personality, whereas a creature lacking the rational and volitional powers necessary for responsibility or for autonomy might have types of memory and self-awareness that make unity of consciousness over time possible. Thus Alasdair MacIntyre also responds to Parfit that my identity as a "character" in a shared history, or loss of such identity, cannot be founded "on the psychological continuity or discontinuity of the self" in Locke's sense.<sup>9</sup> For practical identity turns on relations of meaning; it is often held to involve what we may call the "existential" meaningfulness of a life *to the agent* living it -- that is, a sense of his activities

and relationships as worthwhile, rather than pointless. As David Carr says, the issue is not whether the physical world is really meaningless: "it is human reality, including the very activity of projecting our concerns, which is portrayed in stories, and against which narrative must be measured..."<sup>10</sup>

The issue is whether practical identity is a kind of narrative identity, or (a bit more weakly) is usefully understood on the analogy of narrative structures. Key objections to such narrative accounts include all the following:

- (1) Defenders of narrative accounts are not sufficiently clear about what constitutes the type of narrative that is said to constitute practical identity (or to be an essential aspect of it).<sup>11</sup> The relevant sense(s) of narrative cannot be trivial, or the narrativist thesis becomes vacuous.
- (2) How can one's "whole life" consist of (or even be much *like*) a single unified story, given that such stories are human *artifacts* (e.g. biographies, historical accounts, or fictional novels) and that their unity results from *selecting* among many possible plot-developments, details of settings, thoughts, and actions etc in order to present one interpretation of a set of events?<sup>12</sup>
- (3). Given the ever-present temptation to rationalize events or aspects of our life that may conflict with others or make little sense, and our propensity to retouch the more unsavory or less interesting features of life, isn't any tale we tell ourselves about our practical identity bound to be full of convenient omissions, exaggeration, half-truths, and other types of self-deception?<sup>13</sup>
- (4) If practical identities consist of, or require, a narrative structure in order to be intelligible to the agents whose identities they are, how can they have normative implications for human life? How can it be *better* to live a unified life if narrative unity is a constitutive condition?<sup>14</sup>
- (5) Even if types of narrative unity that go beyond the constitutive conditions of intelligible action can be distinguished as normative ideals for our practical identities, they may exaggerate the level and/or kinds of coherence and continuity that are good for us, or that lead to a rich and life full of meaning. They may cut us off from novelty, steer us away from accepting tensions or dilemmas that we ought to embrace, ask us to ignore important aspects of our life in the name of greater coherence.<sup>15</sup> We need to know what *kinds* of unity are important for a fully developed practical identity or robustly meaningful life.<sup>16</sup>
- (6) Given our mortality, a person's life cannot be a "complete" story for her while she is living it; at best, it can only become a unified narrative for others after her death. Thus the analogy between lives and stories breaks down completely at the fatal end-point.<sup>17</sup>

These objections can also be stated as theoretical questions, as Marya Schechtman does.<sup>18</sup> Several of them are closely related, and they are sometimes run together in the critical discussions. There are also other worries about claims made for narrative unity that aren't neatly subsumed under one of these headings, and several further objections specifically concern Kierkegaard's ideas. These include Lippitt's arguments that narrative unity or intelligibility cannot distinguish ethical selfhood from the diverse aesthetic ways of life or explain the supposed superiority of an ethical life-view. But before these worries about "MacIntyrean" readings of Kierkegaard can be addressed, the more general objections (1) - (4) must be met. Most of this paper concerns that foundational task.

## II. Three Levels of Narrative Unity

**Rudd and Contemporary Action Theory.** In response to Lippitt, Rudd offers answers to

all these questions, but I will focus here on the first two. Rudd begins by emphasizing that the type of narrative that MacIntyre associates with actual (rather than fictional) human life has to do with the intelligibility of intentional actions: unlike a scientific explanation in terms of efficient-causal chains, and MacIntyrean narrative “is essentially teleological – it provides reasons, not just causes.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the reasons that make present movements intelligible as actions depend for their significance on their complex web of relationships to other events, actions, and reasons considered at other times and places by this agent or others, as well their perceived relation to future prospects. Thus the intelligibility of discrete intentional actions, or short series of actions in the extended present, is nested in a much wider wholistic context. As Rudd puts it, if we reject atomistic accounts of action and recognize that reasons-explanations will make reference to a “mini-narrative” even in cases like Galen Strawson’s well-known example of making a particular cup of coffee,<sup>20</sup> we cannot stop there. For we cannot understand these mini-narratives without “at least implicitly thinking of them as embedded in and deriving intelligibility from the person’s whole life.” Thus “normal human agents do have a sense of themselves as characters in a developing story,” in which current choices are understood as a response to situations shaped by the past and looking towards the future.<sup>21</sup> Even though we experience our story as incomplete while still living it, we experience important life-decisions as potentially affecting the meaning of many aspects of our life, and the significance of past episodes is revised by later developments.<sup>22</sup> This kind of temporal “weave” of significance (as I’ll call it) strongly resembles the meaning-networks we find in fictional narratives, although the weave is certainly more complex in real lives. Thus it is my status as a temporally continuing, self-conscious agent that unavoidably involves a narrative sense (however inchoate) of my entire practical identity *and* the social relations with which it is bound up. The intentional actions of persons “do not exist in their own right, prior to an independently of their narration,” but rather as parts of larger narrative wholes.<sup>23</sup>

Rudd is on solid ground in making both these claims, though I will suggest that they apply to two distinct levels of unity. Recent work in action theory by Carlos Moya, among others, strongly supports MacIntyre’s insights about the reasons that make action intelligible as intentional. Moya thinks this is most easily seen in “meaningful” acts like signaling, which involve commitment to follow norms or rules shared in the communication-community relating these acts to intended future acts.<sup>24</sup> And this capacity for commitment to future action, which is intrinsically intentional and irreducible to mere physical happenings, “is an essential part of our agency and our consciousness of being agents.”<sup>25</sup> More generally, simple actions like turning a steering wheel become intentional only as part of a coherent plan involving future actions leading to the further end of the action-series.<sup>26</sup> Intentions are also not isolable atomic phenomena; they “can exist only in the wider context of a mind” with multiple intentions connected by coherence requirements.<sup>27</sup> Of course sometimes our intentions, beliefs, and current actions are not coherently related, but “Cases of incoherence can arise only against a background of coherence.”<sup>28</sup> The mental life of agents in general is pervaded by normativity and holism: “Intentional states are essentially a network, a whole system. They are not discrete, separate items.”<sup>29</sup>

This analysis supports, and is supported by, other recent theories of intentional and responsible agency. Summarizing his work before the turn of the century, Michael Bratman’s writes that “Our purposive activity is typically embedded in multiple, interwoven quilts of partial, future-directed plans of action,” which “typically have a hierarchical structure” with means and “preliminary steps” embedded in ends, and proximate ends embedded in further ends;” such a background provides a framework within which practical deliberation takes place, and imposes

end-neutral rational requirements “for the coherence and consistency of plans.”<sup>30</sup> Similar points about intentional action are made by David Velleman, although, following Grice and Harman, he hypothesizes that intention consists in prediction of our own future action combined with a desire to be right in such self-predictions.<sup>31</sup> Citing Bratman, Velleman notes that our current motives (along with instrumental beliefs) are insufficient to settle parts of our future course of action as the planning needed for many aspects of our lives requires; only intentions can do this.<sup>32</sup> It is then no surprise that Velleman has recently adopted a narrative account of practical identity.<sup>33</sup>

Thus contemporary action theory continues to bear out the insights of *After Virtue* ch.15 that Rudd defends. However, it is crucial to remember that the kind of narrative holism about practical reasons found at this level is *constitutive* of extended intentional action or planning agency as such (though not required for all purposive movement, e.g. that of a dog or sub-intentional human activity). Let me dub this "base level" unity, or unity-1. To lack this base-level coherence in self-understanding is not to have an ethically bad life; it is rather to lack what (building on Susan Wolf and John Fischer) I've called “moral sanity,” which is a key part of the control conditions for full moral responsibility.<sup>34</sup> Unity-1 is thus significantly stronger than unity of apperception. For example, after saying that strong or "complete" unity is impossible because of the openness of the future and the special problem of death, Lippitt describes a weaker form:

However fragmented my life, it is a unity in the most minimal sense that it is in some sense "mine." Even the most radical schizophrenic, one of whose multiple personalities seizes the reins every ten minutes, can probably still give a name when his psychiatrist's secretary tries to book him in for the next session.<sup>35</sup>

This subject (who suffers from severe dissociative disorder, not schizophrenia), lacks unity-1 and thus could not be held responsible for keeping promises or for any kind of temporally extended activities that depend on planning. Lippitt's suggestion is that he may still retain a weak unity of apperception, or sense that all these personalities are experienced by "one" consciousness. Let us call this unity-0: here different experiences "belong" to the same consciousness only in the minimal sense that they occur within a field of awareness that reidentifies itself. Perhaps certain higher apes normally have this awareness, even if they lack planning agency. This distinction is important: when Rudd says that "Insofar as I'm not in a zombie-like state of automatism, I am aware of myself (even if only implicitly) as acting in a certain way in order to bring about certain results, which I want because they fit in with certain plans or ambitions,"<sup>36</sup> he is contrasting a state that lacks even unity-0 with an agent who enjoys unity-1. There is probably a significant step in between, e.g. a child of 1½ years who smiles, laughs, and walks towards the cat he remembers seeing yesterday but who is not yet capable of more complex plan-like intentions, like getting back at his older sister next week.

Unity-0 is important as a substratum for unity-1 and in its own right. When it is lost between two phases of life, the consciousness psychological connection between them is cut. For example, the character "V" in the film *V for Vendetta* has no memory of his life before the bizarre biological experiment that gave him extraordinary physical and mental powers, though his life from then on becomes unified in senses much stronger than unity-1 (indeed it is too bent on a single finite end, as he finally discovers).<sup>37</sup> Likewise the sort of person Schechtman cites as lacking "weak" narrative unity because of "Korsakoff syndrome or advanced dementia" may suffer partial loss of unity-0, and thus significant difficulties in exercising planning agency as

well.<sup>38</sup> But unity-0, as Lippitt says, is too weak to support further claims about ethical life made by "MacIntyrean Kierkegaardians."<sup>39</sup> In fact, to be a Kierkegaardian "aesthete," I think an agent needs both unity-0 and unity-1<sup>40</sup>; like normal human "wantons" in Frankfurt's sense, he is capable of complex instrumental reason, of an accumulating past, and of future potentials, though he may try to live only 'in the moment.' By contrast, a human subject incapable of planning agency is largely incompetent rather than aesthetic; she is incapable of full responsibility for most of what she does. An aesthete's base-level unity-1 makes him capable of a stronger type of narrative coherence (call it unity-2) that he could build using his native powers of "will" to form cares that self-perpetuate through time. The aesthete either fails to exercise this power, or intentionally refrains from it. Narrative unity-2 is associated with the familiar though hard-to-explain concepts of autonomy and authenticity in one's practical identity; it also takes us closer to a non-trivial sense of a "whole life." If we can specify a type of narrative linkage that is stronger than unity-1 and necessary for, involved in, or resultant from other key features of autonomous or authentic identities, then objection (4) will be answered, and probably objection (5) as well – for the substantive questions raised in (5) concern the diachronic structure of autonomous character and the relation among authentic identity-defining commitments.

Here again narrativists find strong support in contemporary analytic literature, this time from "coherence" theories of autonomy and from volitional conceptions of "caring." For example, consider Laura Ekstrom's argument that autonomy resides in "uncoercively formed preference[s]" that express the agent's synchronically coherent and lasting strong evaluation of her desires.<sup>41</sup> But before we can consider an argument that autonomy involves stronger kinds of narrative unity that are optional with respect to responsible planning agency in general, we have to evaluate in detail the most fundamental problem for the signature narrativist thesis that constitutive unity-1 extends to the whole life of a distinct self -- or equivalently, that your practical identity *is* a unique narrative of some kind. This is objection (2).

### III. Literature vs Life: the Hard Problem and the Narrative Realist Response

**Williams's Flawed Critique of MacIntyre.** While contemporary narrative theories of practical identity developed from several sources in the last three decades, MacIntyre's brief discussion in *After Virtue* is one of the most influential. For that reason, or perhaps because he directly compares lives to literary genres, MacIntyre is the most frequent target of criticism that narrativists confuse literature and life. For instance, in a posthumous essay titled "Life as Narrative," Bernard Williams responds directly to MacIntyre's claims that "stories are lived before they are told..."<sup>42</sup> He notes that according to MacIntyre, beyond the level of intelligible action, the whole process of living is social story-telling: "the narrative I *construct* for myself has to be part of a larger narrative enterprise, reaching beyond myself. This is one reason why I am only co-author of the narrative" of my life.<sup>43</sup> But Williams complains that this is ambiguous: "When MacIntyre says that the narrative structure of actions is prior to people's narrations, does he mean that it is prior to fictional narration, to any artful narration, or to any telling at all?" Call the third option the *maximal priority thesis*. Williams maintains that it must be false, for in

...the essentially narrative understanding of complex human actions and the living of lives...what makes a given story a good story cannot be altogether prior to any telling at all, even if it is prior to the telling of that particular story. One respect... in which the narrative structure of complex

human agency could not be entirely prior to narration, in the sense of mere telling, is that it could not be entirely prior to telling by agents themselves. This, surely, is what MacIntyre means. So when he says that narrative structure is prior to narrations by novelists and [poets or dramatists], he does not mean that narrative is prior to any telling at all, but that artless telling is prior to artful telling, or factual telling is prior to fictional, or both.<sup>44</sup>

But then, since we cannot identify narratives that are about a person's life without a prior concept of personhood, our ability to pick out a person and a person's life is prior to any such narrative, Williams insists: some "idea of the coherence of a person's life" has to precede even artless narration. He rejects the response proposed by MacIntyre (and Rudd) that narrative structure and personhood are mutually interdependent concepts, neither being reducible to the other. Because narratives are perspectival and constructed, incommensurable stories may both be convincing.<sup>45</sup> Thus, "at the level of narrative interpretation of a whole life," MacIntyre's account of practical identity is subject to skeptical critique.<sup>46</sup> For MacIntyre thinks that "the unity of an actual life is like the unity of a fictional life." Call this *the analogy thesis*; it holds that narrative unity "is first found in life, and is carried over from life to the construction of fiction." Williams thinks this is radically mistaken, because fictional characters are artifacts; having no future, "fictional characters are not living at all."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the "character that in fact I am" on MacIntyre's account is not determined by my social relations or unchosen attachments before I live my life.<sup>48</sup> The claim rejected here is what I have previously called the *narrative essentialist thesis* that at any time in their life (or even before they live, if we allow talk of possible persons), each person has an individual essence that is identical with the style and character of the protagonist of a historically unique complete life-to-death narrative.<sup>49</sup> Williams concludes that "the idea of a completed, unified, or coherent narration is of no help in leading a life. The idea of living a life as a quest for narrative is baseless;" even if a biographer can retroactively fit such a narrative to one's life once it is over, our aspiration should not be to make it easy for biographers.<sup>50</sup>

While that is surely right, there are several problems with Williams' critique of MacIntyre. First, Williams slides quickly from objection (2) to objections (4) and (6). In this respect, Lippitt is more careful. Second, there is some irony in Williams' position, since MacIntyre's account of personal identity is a response to Parfit starting from the same insights about the continuity of life from the practical standpoint that informed Williams' own response to Parfit in "Persons, character, and morality." Third and most importantly, Williams treats the three theses I've distinguished as if they were logically inseparable. They are not; I have twice critiqued narrative essentialism as incompatible with libertarian freedom<sup>51</sup> (although I'm now less sure that MacIntyre ever meant to endorse narrative essentialism). Below I will reject the maximal priority thesis, since our reflection on our lives, including aspects of our "self-image" and the ways we interpret relations among episodes in our history, inevitably affect the diachronic web of meanings-relations with which we always prereflectively operate as we go on. However, these points do not threaten the analogy thesis *at all*.

Against the analogy thesis, Williams is dogmatic. In insisting that the narrative unity of a fictional character cannot be significantly like that of a real practical identity, he just presupposes that narrative identities are constructs resulting from explicit acts of telling, or artifacts of our self-narration. That is why we are unlike fictional characters who can be "a given whole" which is "always already there" in their beginning.<sup>52</sup> Now this claim about literary characters is dubious; as we read a good story that follows the codes of its genres fairly closely, we often have the sense

that characters could go either way. Lear does not have to lose Cordelia; Angel Clare could stay with Tess and devote himself fully to her; Gollum could repent as he watches Frodo sleeping on the stairs to Cirith Ungol.<sup>53</sup> If we really get *inside* what Tolkien called the “subcreated” world of a good story, it feels very much like time flows through forking paths, as in real life. Often this is true even for the author: Tolkien reports that after he first described “Strider” in the bar at Bree, he was not sure for months who this character really was. But even those who agree with Williams about literary characters still have no evidence that the dramatic tension we feel as their story unfolds is not derived from its multiple similarities to the actual development of life for real practical identity. The analogy thesis can be true even if narrative essentialism and maximal priority are false. It has seemed implausible to many critics primarily because of an underlying assumption about “narrative” that is rarely recognized and evaluated.

### **Lippitt, Sartre, and the Logological Fallacy: The Four Theses of Narrative Realism.**

The heart of Williams skepticism about “life-narratives” lies in his assumption that any story-like structure must be “told”-- if not by others, then by the agent herself. Similar points are more clearly articulated by Lippitt, who rightly focuses much of his discussion on this issue (while linking it to objections 3 and 6). He says that “by taking literary narratives as the default kind of narrative, MacIntyre offers a misleading guide to understanding human life,” while also forgetting that our existence in time makes it impossible for us to have a “whole life.”<sup>54</sup> To support this claim, Lippitt cites Ricoeur’s plausible view that with their clear beginnings and endings, novels (even of the most elaborate sort) always have a simpler temporal structure than human life as experienced from the inside, where your memory fades off in the far past and anticipation reaches uncertainly towards your death. Lippitt also emphasizes his agreement with Ricoeur and Mulhall that since I cannot grasp my life as a whole when it is over, “the one person whose unified ‘life narrative’ I can’t in principle have access to is my own.”<sup>55</sup> However, as I suggested, it is important to keep the special problem of death distinct from the more basic issue in objection (2) which arises even for the claim that my life is now an unfinished narrative. Against this claim, Lippitt approvingly cites Mulhall’s Sartrean argument that because the self as object of reflective consciousness does not coincide with the subject doing the reflecting, any narrative it can “tell” about itself will fail to include this very narrating act.<sup>56</sup>

Now this particular Sartrean argument that human life in the present transcends narrative structure is mistaken, and it is important to see why, since Sartre’s influence has made it common in contemporary continental thought. Sartre’s insights that (i) the subject of consciousness always transcends the intensional contents of its thetic awareness, and that (ii) this also applies to reflective consciousness (which does not ‘see’ the subject doing the reflecting), were developed from Kant and Fichte in order to show that our certainty of our own existence must involve an immediate prereflective self-awareness (an idea developed systematically by Dieter Henrich and Manfred Frank). Even beyond the extended present, the binding together of past events and future possibilities in human lived time goes on constantly at this pre-thetic level: reflective acts are not needed for this kind of continuity. But Sartre’s argument also applies only to the basic level of consciousness for which unity-0 is the issue: in agreement with Kant, Sartre shows that the unity of apperception is not dependent on Descartes-style explicit reflection on one’s own sentience (instead, Descartes’s thought-experiment is possible only because of prior prereflective self-awareness). As a result, Sartre’s point (i) applies to the consciousness of *any* animal, and his point (ii) applies to any reflective self-consciousness, including the simplest sub-human kinds (perhaps

that of an intelligent ape or dolphin). They imply nothing about the structure of *practical identity* constituted by unity-1 and developed in unity-2, except that these will always include prereflective levels of awareness. The illusion that Sartre's analysis threatens the narrative unity-1 of a practical identity arises from thinking that anything like a narrative structure must be *recounted, composed, or articulated*, as if its entire contents must be the object of explicit reflection. This is largely true of biographies, historical accounts, and fictional stories, which consist primarily in explicit statements (though they also operate by engrossing us in their flow). But it is not true of self-narratives, in which most of the content does not result from rendition, speech, or explicit interpretative acts, and most of what does result from reflection is then sustained nonreflectively.

This error is so prevalent and vital to the entire debate that it requires its own name: I'll call it the *logological fallacy* about narrative identity to indicate its equation of narrative structure with a "logos" or account. As David Carr explains, "This objection derives ...from the claim that narrative structure requires not only a temporal configuration of events but also a narrator and a possible audience."<sup>57</sup> According to the objector, life is lived as a stream of experience without

the authoritative, retrospective standpoint of the story-teller. Thus the real difference between "art" and "life" is not organization vs chaos, but rather the absence in life of that point of view which transforms events into a story by telling them. Narrative requires narration...not just a recounting of events, but a recounting informed by a kind of superior knowledge.<sup>58</sup>

This assumption that "Narrative requires narration" is the root of narrato-skepticism about "whole lives." For example, Lippitt quotes Lamarque's claims that "Few people even attempt to *tell* the complete story of their lives..." and that "For most important sequences of events, most people have more than one narrative to *tell*..."<sup>59</sup> as if it follows from this that they would have no unique life-narrative. Lippitt concludes from Mulhall and Lamarque that "no narrative I could ever *tell* about my 'whole life' could ever...make it a 'unity' in any full and robust sense..."<sup>60</sup> Likewise Lippitt draws from Turner the lesson that it is the embellishment and omission involved in artful "telling" that make self-deception almost inevitable in "telling the tale" of our lives. Notice the repeated emphasis on 'spinning a yarn' in words or thoughts.

The main weakness in the logological assumption should be apparent from Lippitt's own version of objection (3) that some stories others tell about us (or that we tell about ourselves) are "closer to the truth" than other stories, even if the former are less interesting or beautiful. What he fails to address is the nature of the "truthmaker" implied here. Lippitt takes for granted that what makes one story more accurate and another more deceptive are simply some discrete facts about actions and events, or physical and psychological states of affairs, that stand in no *irreducibly narrational* relationship with one another; for any such relation *must* be a later imposition resulting from a logos, an account or telling of some kind. That is what the narrative theorist should deny: to answer objection (2), she should claim (A) that *the truthmaker itself has a narrative structure*, or at least something very much *like* the multi-dimensional web of compounded, ramifying, and temporally extended meaning-relations that we find in stories recounted, told, or made by human storytelling – even though in this truthmaker, much of this structure is not a result of any logos, accounting, or reflective act. The narrator should also claim (B) that this structure has unity-1 built into it when it makes some stories true about an agent, and that the agent whose structure it is can give it unity-2 through volitional and cognitive efforts of certain kinds.

This way of restating the central narrativist theses about practical identity makes clear the

strong ontological commitment involved in the position, which is probably why narrativists from MacIntyre on have not presented their view so starkly. The ontological position outlined here, which I'll call *narrative realism* about practical identities, are certainly substantial ones, but only they can resolve the main ambiguity about the relation between literature and life in narrativist theories. Sometimes a theory actually has to make stronger claims for its theoretical explanations to be coherent and defensible while remaining phenomenologically true to our experiences.

Narrative realism thus emphasizes the distinction between two levels of narrational structure: the *primary* narrative that is actually lived and is identical with (or at least contains) a person's whole practical identity, and *secondary* narratives that are *about* the primary life-narrative of a person. Biographical and autobiographical narratives have this secondary character; they may or may not accurately reflect the primary narratives they tell about. A third signature narrativist thesis (C) is that the basic human capacity to make secondary narratives, including nonfictional or broadly "historical" accounts and fictional stories, is *derived from* our experience in living out primary narratives – both those that constitute individual practical identities, and those that constitute the identities of interpersonal groups. Art generally imitates life, and deviations from this basic mimetic relationship are intelligible only against the background of the norm. If this weren't the case, how could we care so much, and feel such genuine emotions, about actions and events in fictional narratives?<sup>61</sup> Yet the difference between art and life remains. It is compatible with these thesis to hold that (D) that even the best literary depictions of a fictional life, or biographical portrayals of an actual life, or historical works about groups of persons, necessarily fall short of the almost infinite detail significance and resonance of synchronic and diachronic meaning-relations that are found in real life, which words can never fully capture. This is why the skeptics are quite right that actual lives do not fall neatly into genres, or follow conventional plot-structures, or exactly repeat fictional settings, or ever fit perfectly into situation-paradigms that are familiar in literary traditions (for example, think of the archetypal troubadour romance of a knight performing many daring, though often intrinsically unnecessary, feats of bravery at the whim of an apparently merciless noblewoman who hides her true interest in him). We use familiar narrative schemata in interpreting ourselves, and must do so to some significant extent, but we should also beware of the limits of 'paradigm scripts' for identities, personality types, and emotional dispositions.

**Constructivist Narrative Theories.** I have tried to summarize a plausible kind of realism about life-narratives in four theses that also agree, in my view, with Kierkegaard's reflections on selfhood and the existential stages, which are especially helpful in thinking about unity-2. But before further defending these theses and Kierkegaard's narrative realism, we must first be clear that most philosophers, psychologists, and social theorists who describe personal identity as a narrative phenomenon mean something weaker than theses (A) - (D) describe. They take different positions on the ontological spectrum short of narrative realism. Some seek to avoid the sort of problems that Williams and Lippitt raise by treating talk of primary "life-narratives" as merely metaphorical, or as a useful heuristic not meant to carry any serious metaphysical baggage. Others think that primary narratives and the practical identities they constitute are more than merely useful "as if" devices for thinking about our lives, but are still *constructed* by some kind of "narration" or artistic practice of giving a logos to what in itself essentially lacks any meaningful structure. And since the idea of an identity as an artwork that we make has been popular since Nietzsche<sup>62</sup> (and may be quite useful in explaining unity-2), many have found it attractive to think

that our identity is formed by the stories we tell ourselves about our life. This *simple constructivist* view is certainly the type of narrative identity theory that has become most popular across the humanities in general and especially in psychology today. As just one example, consider Thomas King's intentionally enigmatic statement that "The truth about stories is that that's all we are."<sup>63</sup> It sounds like there is something deep here, but there isn't: there's only deep ambiguity (which contrasts with the insights in King's many poignant stories about people he's known). Either this view falls into the serious problems laid out by Lippitt, Williams, and other skeptics, or it's really a backhanded way of accepting the skeptical conclusion that constructivism implies *fictionalism* – that our identities are largely illusions, imaginary artifacts of language with little relation to deep psychological facts.

This more sophisticated version of constructivism has become enormously influential in literary theory and the social sciences, so much so that Carr calls it "the standard view:"

Fictional stories are distinct from 'reality' or 'real life' not just because they are fictional....but also because ...of the way those events are interrelated as fictionally presented. As for any discourse – like history, but also including biography, journalism, or even anecdote – which claims to represent the real: to the extent that it does so in narrative form, that form must alienate it from the reality of events that it relates. Such form is 'imposed' on reality... It distorts life. At best it constitutes an escape, a consolation, at worst an opiate, either as self-delusion or...imposed from without by some authoritative narrative voice in the interest of manipulation and power.<sup>64</sup>

Donald Polkinghorne argues that such fictionalist constructivism is heavily influenced by the linguistic turn and "the post-structuralists' views on the relation between language and extra-linguistic reality."<sup>65</sup> The idea that everything we experience, think, and believe we know "are constructions of the conceptual network of our particular language system" leads to the view that personal identities are also "language constructions imposed on our lives by the social context in which we happen to live."<sup>66</sup> For example, we typologize our identities according to familiar cultural scripts for different types of personalities and stock characters from our media. The most radical version of this approach says that the very idea of individual identity is a social construct; "the self is an artifact of language."<sup>67</sup> A somewhat less radical version of this position holds that

...the literary form of narrative, with its linkage of life events and actions as contributors to a final denouement, is an imposed structure and is not descriptive of life as lived. ...Life consists in a mere sequence of events in which one thing follows after the other; it is not the connected unity that narrative depicts. Narrated life-stories are distortions, not descriptions, of the life as lived.<sup>68</sup>

Polkinghorne and Carr attribute this view to Frank Kermode, Seymour Chatman, Louis Mink, and Hayden White, who all emphasize artifact-nature of *told* stories. Both versions of fictionalist constructivism are thus really forms of error-theory about identity: our sense of who we are is embodied in a personal narrative that must always grossly falsify reality just because it is a narrative: there is no such storied identity at the noumenal level. The more radical group implies that this illusion is nefarious and potentially escapable, whereas the less radical group thinks we need selves but must be contented with enlightened fictions. MacIntyre attributes the radical view to Sartre's *La Nausée*, though his answer to Sartre's version of objection (2) is too brief.<sup>69</sup>

Thus it turns out that many theorists who at first appear endorse narrative accounts of identity actually agree with Lippitt's worries, and even push them to dogmatic extremes that

Lippitt clearly does not.<sup>70</sup> What Lippitt mainly shares with these constructivists is the logological assumption. This assumption is fostered by the limits of the available terminology in which the whole debate developed: since "narrative" is a literary concept, it is easy to assume that a "life-story" must be something told, something that consists in accounts given to oneself or to others, something that only exists in virtue of communicative acts of some kind aimed at an audience.

The same holds for analytic philosophers who are fictionalists. For example, David Velleman summarizes Dennett's idea of the self as the "center of narrative gravity" as follows:

...the autonomous person ...is an illusion conjured up by the human organism....In Dennett's metaphor, the self is the non-existent author of a merely fictional autobiography composed by the human organism, which neither is nor embodies a real self. So understood, the self has the status of an *abstractum*, a fictional object...<sup>71</sup>

that it is nevertheless highly useful for us to believe in. Selves are merely parts of the "intentional stance" and result from our brain's efforts to make a coherent story about who we are (a process rife with rationalization and defense mechanisms). The protagonist of 'your' autobiography is a fictional character with your name, but the author is really a brain that belongs to no one (it isn't *really* 'your' brain).<sup>72</sup> Against the obvious objection that this credits human brains with most of the powers that we'd normally attribute to "real selves," Dennett suggests that an unconscious computer in a robot might be able to write or tell a good novel about its identity and history.

Velleman critiques this idea that selves are personifications of control centers in the brain; he argues instead that when life-narrative are told, they exercise a causal influence on the sources of the narration as well. Even if these sources are distinct from the protagonist of their story, it has to portray the protagonist as living this story, and thus portray her as conforming her future actions to forward-looking elements in the story so far.<sup>73</sup> This ingenious modification alters Dennett's picture considerably, but as Velleman explains, it still leaves us with a quasi-fictional self. Now "the person's autobiography" or "self-conception" takes over much of the control-function, since it heavily influences what the brain control-centers do hour by hour: so the partial story that is the self also comes to act as co-author of its subsequent episodes. On this theory, the self is more than Dennett's merely useful heuristic: rather, the self is constituted by the narrative coherence over time of various (mostly sentient) thoughts, and this mental construct perpetuates itself by bringing it about that brain and body act according to its self-expectations and themes, thus "maintaining the internal coherence of the story itself."<sup>74</sup> For my purposes though, whether we see Velleman's alternative as a fictional construct or real process, the key point is that it still makes the narrative self arise from *logoi* or accounts that are mostly thought in words as verbalized or inner speech.

**Carr and Ricoeur: Narrative Realism.** To develop the kinds of narrative theories of practical identity sketched in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, we must look beyond MacIntyre's literary analogies for a better way to defend thesis (A). Lippitt is right that MacIntyre's short account alone won't do the job. However, the more fully worked out accounts of primary narrative offered by Carr and Paul Ricoeur are much closer to providing what the Kierkegaardian narrativist needs. Space allows only brief comments on their contributions here, but I follow Polkinghorne in holding that Ricoeur's late work from the last volume of *Time and Narrative* clearly supports a realist view like Carr's, Bruner's and Olafson's that before autobiography, real human lives exhibit the same sort of "synthesis of the heterogeneous" that we find in stories.<sup>75</sup> Carr began by arguing

that historical narratives need not falsify the lives and events they recount, because behind all literary products "narrative structure pervades our very experience of time and social existence, independently of our contemplating the past as historians."<sup>76</sup> In his version of thesis (C), Carr adds that literary narrative "arises out of and is prefigured in certain features of life, action, and communication" that naturally lend themselves to narrative "configuration."<sup>77</sup> Following Husserl, he argues that we have extended experiences whose parts correspond to the parts of temporally extended processes in the world. Stream of consciousness is thus "lived as a complex of configurations whose phases figure as parts within larger wholes."<sup>78</sup> Like Rudd, MacIntyre, and Moya, Carr argues that familiar actions like serving a tennis ball are not composed of atomic or "basic actions" but of a single process that is both psychological and physiological, whose phases are "interdependent."<sup>79</sup> In passive experience and in action, "the temporal span is configured into events, in the one case, and actions, in the other," which are in turn "closed" or distinguished from the surroundings or background.<sup>80</sup> Thus something like the distinction between "setting" and the drama unfolding across different scenes is already involved in prereflective lived time. Actions and events are experienced as temporal gestalts with beginnings, middles, and ends.<sup>81</sup> Given its means-ends structure, the completion of an action requiring effort is also a practical closure or solution to a preexisting problem. These features are all found in even short-term contexts.<sup>82</sup> All of this is similar to Rudd's arguments for what I called constitutive narrative unity-1.

Carr initially thought that Ricoeur's view was close to White's and Mink's, although Ricoeur recognized that the "world of action" has a quasi-narrative form that lends itself to "narrative configuration."<sup>83</sup> As Carr says, according to Ricoeur,

Life is not alien to narrative structure, nor does it need to borrow from literature to achieve such structure. It has its own structure, which is "not reducible to simple discordance," not simply chaotic, but is a kind of "inchoate narrativity," [or] "prenarrative structure."<sup>84</sup>

In Kant's sense, we might say that life in the practical standpoint is already "schematized" in a way that makes it narratable, or allows us to represent it well using concepts such as plot, setting, goal, means, interaction, accident, convergence, resemblance, and so on that make a coherent story. But Carr fears that Ricoeur's way of resolving the basic contradiction between lived time and cosmic time in a poetics of narrative time conceives the latter as redescribing an extra-linguistic reality that is inherently more discordant. "[I]n the end it seems that the gap between narrative and life is left open."<sup>85</sup>

Carr himself admits that there are important differences between lived experience and narratives that imitate it, while leaving out much of its detail. But the difference is not as sharp as implied by critics who think there is no selection in life because there is no narrator in the stream:

Narratives do select; and life is what the select from. But it hardly follows that in life, no selection takes place. Our very capacity for attention, and for following through more or less long-term and complex endeavours, is our capacity for selections. Extraneous details are not left out, but they are pushed into the background, saved for later, ranked in importance. And whose narrative voice is accomplishing all this? None but our own, of course. In planning our days and lives we are composing the stories or the dramas we will act out and which will determine the focus of our attention and our endeavours...<sup>86</sup>

Since Carr adds that this is a kind of "story-telling" in which we explain our acts to ourselves and

to others, this formulation risks encouraging a logological conception of primary narrative. But his key insight is that patterns of *salience*, or immediate sensitivity to greater and lesser relevance of details in our current experience (which also highlight some relations to past events more than others) permeate our planning agency. I would add that if we did not prereflectively gestalt details and meaning-relations this way, then human attention could never avoid the so-called "framing problem" for artificial intelligence. In fact, some accounts of emotion imply that in this prethetic framing process, we often perceive our current situation as fitting stock paradigms for various affects.<sup>87</sup> This is also surely true at reflective levels in which self-understanding recognizes patterns in our development or personality as similar to various plot-structures, character-types, and models of interaction familiar from stories and cultural scripts. But even if our reflective self-interpretation can err, and conflict with how others see us, the vital point is that all the narrative structure is not just imposed *ex post facto* by reflection on atomic events: "Narrative coherence does not impose itself on an incoherent, merely sequential existence, but is drawn from life."<sup>88</sup>

As I read him, Ricoeur means to articulate much the same relationship. He believes that Aristotle was on the right track in thinking that "whatever the mind constructs through its narrative activity...it finds succession in things before taking it up again in itself."<sup>89</sup> Although this did not resolve the main aporia of time, it anticipated Dilthey's insight that the "connectedness of life" as an "ordered sequence of experiences" involving "change and permanence" is not merely an artifact of reflective recounting. What Heidegger calls "self-constancy" (*Selbständigkeit*) is a proto-historical endurance through time that occurs even before any actual historical texts are written or historical stories are told.<sup>90</sup> It is precisely for this reason that "historical time" can mediate between the lived time of subjectivity and objective or cosmic time.<sup>91</sup> Historical explanation cannot be done accurately in terms of law-like invariants because that is not how the agents involved experienced the significance of past developments, present events, and future possibilities in acting out their part in the sequence that a historical account aims to explain.<sup>92</sup> There would be little difference between fiction and history if there weren't "a certain correspondence between our [historical] narrative and what really happened." The correspondence, Ricoeur suggests, is one of *analogy*.<sup>93</sup> This means that "what really happened" was itself *like* a narrative in form, though of course the historical account is a "reconstruction" of the "course of events." This "course of events" prefigures the best narrative that can be told about it, making it possible to "do justice" to it, or to "render" it in artwork, as he puts it.<sup>94</sup> Specifically, relation can be understood in terms of the four basic tropes of classical rhetoric, especially metaphor: "...between a narrative and a course of events, there is not a relation of reproduction, reduplication, or equivalence, but a metaphorical relation."<sup>95</sup> This is probably the kind of statement that worries Carr, but I think Ricoeur means that what analytic philosophers writing about action and responsibility call the "actual sequence" of events is itself quasi-narrative before it is reflectively understood in any logos; thus it lends itself to such a logos. In short, reality as experienced from the practical standpoint is a "world" in Heidegger's sense, a temporal network of meaning-relations.

When he applies this to the "narrative identity" of a person as "soi-même" or "*ipse*," Ricoeur may appear to return to a logological conception, for he says: "the story of a life continues to be refigured by all the truthful *or fictive* stories a subject tells about himself or herself. This refiguration makes this life itself a cloth woven of stories told."<sup>96</sup> Lippitt has shown why we should worry about such a model, and about its naive application in psychoanalysis where the primary narrative of a life is often conceived as something we can fix or "repair" by telling new

stories.<sup>97</sup> However, there remains intuitive appeal in the idea that our articulated self-conceptions do affect our life-narrative. But this should be understood as a point about a second level of life-narrative that can consistently be added to Ricoeur's basic insight: autobiographical reflection supplements the quasi-narrative experience reflected on. It is crucial first to isolate that insight, in which thesis (A) of narrative realism is vindicated: namely that human lived experience is more than "a biological phenomenon" because the interests that pervade the practical perspective give rise to a "phronetic understanding" of life as a field of action and passion extending over time. "If indeed action can be recounted, this is because it is already articulated in signs, rules, and norms" even in our prereflective experience of it.<sup>98</sup> Just as action is a "quasi-text" that is already readable in narrative form, there is a general

*...pre-narrative quality of human experience. It is due to this that we are justified in speaking of life as a story in its nascent state, and so of life as an activity and a passion in search of a narrative... It is not by chance or by mistake that we commonly speak of the stories that happen to us, or of stories in which we are caught up.... [We must] grant to experience as such a virtual narrativity which stems, not from the projection of literature onto life, but which constitutes the genuine demand for narrative.*<sup>99</sup>

In defense of this claim, Ricoeur gives several examples in which we want to say that a "chain of episodes" is like a potential story that "has not been told." This is why a story can tell the truth about a person: "the story answers to the man." While our existence and identities are lived stories, "narrating is a secondary process grafted on our 'being-entangled-in-stories.'"<sup>100</sup> This is the key to narrative realism: the reflexive level of story-telling flows from and expresses a narrative-like structure that is already there before we represent it in a logos. As Rudd says in response to Lamarque, "I don't have to be constantly reciting the story of my life to date to have an essentially narrative conception of who I am as a temporal being. The existence of that self-conception is what gives meaning to what I am doing now." And this implicit story (with unity-1) is "the basis for my capacity to formulate explicit narratives about myself when I do so."<sup>101</sup>

***Narravive: the 'Rosebud' of Practical Identity.*** Thus Ricoeur's account of narrative identity aims to avoid the logical fallacy; it indicates the full resources of narrative realism as a philosophical position on practical identity. However, both Carr and Ricoeur are hindered by the language they have at their disposal. We need to clarify the idea that a human life is an "inchoate narrative" with a "pre-narrative" form,<sup>102</sup> involving "quasi-plot, quasi-character[s], and quasi-event[s]" before it is told.<sup>103</sup> Since "narrative" literally refers to an artifact told or written, we need other terms to avoid confusion, but Ricoeur's substitutes can seem obscure. A better neologism is the combination "narra-vive," which connotes a story the living of which is, for the most part, prior to its "telling." Referring to a "narravive" also signals that we are not talking about a told narrative in the familiar sense, since the life of a responsible agent is not (at its basic level) an artistic artifact. But neither is its relation to literary narrative merely metaphorical: a narravive is *analogous* to a narrative, and though biography will always lose much of the detail of personal endurance through time, a story can try to recount in plot, figures, and descriptions the multiply-layered dynamic of an infinitely complex actual narravive. Unlike written or spoken narratives, narravive is an "existential" in Heidegger's sense – not a thing (substance) or a property that we "have" or possess, nor a category of such properties, but rather an ontologically basic mode of

personal existence, a definitive aspect of the type of being who forms a practical identity in time.

In these terms, the narrative realist holds that there is exactly *one narravive* for each practical identity at the constitutive level (unity-1), though higher levels of this identity (and unity-2 if achieved) can change as the narravive is lived. The person's narravive includes such existential changes and foregone possibilities of such changes. It is the measure of truth or accuracy in a biographical or historical narrative about them. To take one of MacIntyre's examples, there are several accounts of Thomas Beckett's life, but some of them are closer to the truth – the narravive that was this person – though presumably only a being like God could know the full contents of such a narravive.

Even in fiction, this analogical relationship is sometimes portrayed (at one remove from reality, of course). In Orson Wells' most famous film, *Citizen Kane*, we are shown at least three different interpretations of Kane's life from his youth through his career as a media millionaire to his failed marriages and lonely old age. But in each, some piece of the puzzle is felt to be missing -- a key to understanding 'who he really was,' a crucial aspect of his practical identity -- which even he may only have dimly sensed until his end, when he looked at the miniature winter landscape in the glass bulb and said "Rosebud" with his dying breath.<sup>104</sup> I will not spoil the mystery; it suffices to say that in the film's final scene, we see what "Rosebud" was. From this insight, we gain an almost-omniscient perspective on what it meant in Kane's life. We grasp a part of his narravive that is missing from all the narratives told about him, all the attempts made to explain his identity: when seen with this new information, his life looks more like a tragedy.<sup>105</sup> Of course this is not an actual narravive; the concept as I've defined it cannot be applied *literally* to a fictional character such as Kane. But it is plausible that the same thing could and does happen with real people: their narravives have secrets that others never know, events and acts affecting their practical identities, affecting the significance-to-them of various objects, words, and deeds in later episodes, in ways even they may never explicitly articulate even to themselves.<sup>106</sup> This fact, which *Citizen Kane* teaches, shows that the logological assumption is a false.

Consider in this light Lippitt's argument regarding Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author "Johannes Climacus:" Lippitt suggests that the famous "graveyard scene" and other personal remarks in the *Postscript* put in doubt the narrative unity of Climacus's life, and more generally show that

the potentially inaccessible 'inwardness' of others is a problem for the 'narrative unity' view [of practical identity], which we must add to the problem of self-deception that haunts any attempt to judge whether one's own life possesses 'narrative unity.'<sup>107</sup>

On the contrary, as we see with Kane, inwardness is no problem for narrative realists: the concept of narravive *explains* how Kane, Climacus, and real people can 'be' something more as practical selves than any narratives about them tell; yet this "more" still has narravive structure.<sup>108</sup> Notably, Kierkegaard was such a person: he knew that his story would never be told in full, that his readers would never understand all the reasons why he did not marry Regine; he may not have been certain of them himself, despite his many enigmatic remarks on the subject. Though this has not stopped biographers from trying, their accounts all feel like the stories significant others told about Kane: they are palpably inadequate. We cannot be certain of Kierkegaard's "Rosebud," but it is evident from his pseudonymous remarks about "inwardness" in general, and "inclosing reserve" in particular,<sup>109</sup> that he understood the Rosebud phenomenon and related problems of

self-deception.

In sum, Lippitt is right that self-deception is a serious and pervasive practical problem: our self-images and self-understanding may diverge significantly from our actual narrative. But these errors themselves consist in failure to match a process with a narrative-like structure. Thus the realist ontological reply to objection (2) also takes care of the theoretical problem in objection (3) (though of course all of us have to face the practical problems of self-deception). The only way to avoid self-deception is through *better* self-narratives, where “better” means interpretations that are more honest and accurate in relation to one’s actual narrative. As Rudd puts it,

...the only way in which we can see that people are self-deceived is to compare the stories they tell with more truthful ones....There is no possibility of getting away from the narrative form altogether... [because] the fact of human life – such as my making coffee or deciding whether to stay late at the office – are already in narrative form, as aspects of lived narratives, which is why they can be truthfully narrated. A particular narrative may be false; but narrative is not intrinsically falsifying.<sup>110</sup>

In other words, only narratives stand a chance of adequately representing our narratives (even if we only have partial direct or reflective access to the latter). As Polkinghorne says, “When we want someone to know who we are, we tell them our life story.”<sup>111</sup> There is no other alternative that is free from the dangers of omission, half-truths, slant, and distortion. Yet precisely because such narratives aim at something real (and communicate this aim), they make an interpersonal validity-claim. As Maria Schechtman has argued, a person's "narrative self-conception" must satisfy a "reality constraint."<sup>112</sup> MacIntyre agrees: although I'm the "subject" of a unique personal history, this history is partly revealed by "what I may justifiably be taken by others to be in the course of living out a story that runs from my birth to my death."<sup>113</sup> We can and do challenge the stories that people tell about their experiences. As Cheryl Misak argues, narratives "are reason structured or open to rational criticism," which allows them to play a beneficial role in ethical deliberation.<sup>114</sup> Through rich reports of experience, we may gain insights into values and norms that are not easily accessible in other ways;<sup>115</sup> they may reveal "moral landscapes" in new clarity.<sup>116</sup> And though narratives are often "rife with exaggeration, omission, and self-deception," we correct for this by not taking them to be incorrigible, by subjecting them to interpersonal discursive tests.<sup>117</sup> For example, we ask whether the narrator only seems focused on telling a good tale, and whether "the events recounted fit with the known facts."<sup>118</sup>

I recognize that, even drawing on the insights of Rudd, Carr, and Ricoeur, I have barely sketched an ontology of personal narratives, and much more needs to be said about this than space allows here. In particular, a more adequate account will have to recognize that the web of significance-relations in narratives extends beyond the sort of teleological meanings that narrative analyses of action and intention have stressed. Beyond means-ends relations, planning, value-perceptions that inform goal-setting, instrumental constraints arising from circumstances and the past, and the field of differentially accessible possibilities extending into the future, are more elusive relations of resemblance and association between present and past -- both at the level of particular objects and signs, and at the level of activity-patterns and situations. These are much harder to describe, but sometimes even a look, a gesture, a phrasing, or object can recall something or someone from the past, give us a premonition of the future, or gain emotional charge from an association we do not reflectively recognize.<sup>119</sup> Who knows how often, or to what extent, the significance I apprehend in words and actions of my younger daughter are affected by certain

memories of my grandmother who she seems to resemble in indefinite yet salient ways. The past comes alive in Proust's cup of coffee or Kane's snowy orb; multiple images of possible futures flash through the mother's mind as her child is born. And these connections then alter other meaning-relations that were already operative, like ramifying waves in a field. Even on the prereflective plane of narravive, the weave of meaning-relations pervades everything in our experience to ineffable limits, like overlapping magnetic fields of almost infinite complexity. Trying to articulate them all in a finite narrative would be like trying to give the formula for a 100 billion massive objects in a galaxy all pulling on each other according to Newton's law of gravitation. Even to calculate the interaction of ten exceeds present computing power, yet they do all move together in a unity we call the Milky Way. Similarly, fields of significance move together, growing and accumulating complexity through time, in the fabric of a narravive.

Yet even this isn't enough. Much of what we hope to learn from a narravive theory of practical identity requires adding back into this fabric the more reflective levels from which I've been abstracting while addressing the logological fallacy. My sketch of narravive identity supports what, in addressing Williams, I called the "analogy thesis," but it does not require the "maximal priority thesis:" although the constitutive level of narravive identity gets going prior to "telling," obviously from a very early point in their lives, children's sense of who they are *is* affected by stories they hear about themselves and their family, views they form concerning their abilities, interests, and potentials. Narrative realism recognizes that the basic distinction between primary narravive and secondary narrative is not a pure dichotomy. Although the "life-narrative" that conditions the meaning of experiences for an agent often operates as an "implicit and automatic" background, as Schechtman says, it also requires an "ability to articulate her narrative locally when appropriate" by giving basic explanations of what she is doing.<sup>120</sup> Thus at least some reflective conception of one's activities seems to be part of planning agency in general, even if one can't articulate a "unifying theme" or "quest" for one's whole life.<sup>121</sup> This articulation condition can be considered a fifth thesis (E) in narrative realism about unity-1. Much more needs to be said about how our reflexive attitudes, including tacit self-imagery and more reflective self-interpretation, get woven into our narravive itself; even episodes of self-deception becomes part of 'our story' in this way. However, at least we now have a better framework in which to reconsider the special reflexive attitudes involved in achieving the thicker sort of unity-2, on which many of the narrato-skeptics' questions focus.

#### **IV. Deep Narrative Unity: Autonomy, Caring, Wholeheartedness, and Ethical Framing**

**Kierkegaardian Extensions of Narrative Realism.** The other main objections to narrative accounts are easier to answer than the 'hard problem' solved by a *narravive* conception of narrative realism. Earlier I suggested that answering narrato-skeptical objections (4) and (5) would require explaining how personal autonomy, authenticity, and ethical maturity involve types of narrative unity beyond the constitutive level that includes non-autonomous and inauthentic practical identities. It is here that Kierkegaard becomes especially interesting for the narrativist in helping to explain and defend two further theses going beyond theses (A) - (E) about unity-1. The first is: (F) Autonomy, understood as the freedom-condition of responsibility for one's character, requires both that we form identity-defining cares and commitments and that we make them into a coherent whole in which wholeheartedness and integrity are possible. Call this the *existential coherence thesis*; it faces Lippitt's objection (5) concerning diversity of ends valued in a rich life

and openness to novelty.<sup>122</sup> It also faces more radical objections that autonomy can be episodic, requiring no long-term commitments or cares in Frankfurt's sense.<sup>123</sup> It is vital in considering such objections to remember that thesis (F) does not claim that *all* the conditions of personal autonomy can be derived from, or encapsulated in, the idea of narrative unity among ends, life-goals, and ground projects – narrative unity may only be part of the picture, though it cannot be a trivial addition either.

The same applies to the distinctly Kierkegaardian thesis (G) that personal autonomy and the narrative unity it involves cannot be developed without accepting objective moral normativity -- some sense of “the good” and “duty” that trumps other values and personal preferences, and that is not simply a function of what satisfies desires the agent's contingent desires. The strength of this thesis, and thus the robustness of narrative unity-2 involved in bringing our other cares and life-projects under ethical ideals, varies according to more specific conceptions of “the ethical.” For instance, Christine Korsgaard defends a version of thesis (G) when she argues that regarding our practical identities as sources of practical reasons for us to act implicitly involves regarding free rational agency as a value to be respected as inviolable, which amounts to accepting the Kantian moral law.<sup>124</sup> But, in itself (G) does not claim, as Lippitt sometimes implies,<sup>125</sup> that the entire content of normative ethics can be derived from the idea of unity-2; it is mostly the other way around, since the conditions of unity-2 alter if conventional, Kantian, or perfectionist moral demands are substituted into (G). Lippitt makes a good case that in *Either/Or II*, Judge William defends several 1<sup>st</sup>-order ethical claims that seems to involve ideas specific to his culture or his religious beliefs;<sup>126</sup> but only some these pertain to “the ethical” as an existential stage and its difference from aestheticism. Agents who satisfy the general condition in (G) can disagree about what “the good” and their duties are, while agreeing that their non-moral pursuits, cares, and personal relationships must be governed by the ethical ideal as they understand it. This implies a kind of *ethical unification* that demarcates such agents from aesthetes, some of whom may have instrumentally sophisticated projects pursued over long periods of time.<sup>127</sup> We must also remember that agents can meet the Judge's volitional condition for autonomy and thus take to heart the authority of ethical norms without succeeding in living according to them, or shaping what they would regard as a *morally good* (let alone perfect) character.

However, there are two closely related objections that do meet (G) head on. The first holds that non-moral cares, commitments, or projects are sufficient for an autonomous life; it is found in Bernard Williams and (in my view, ironically) in Harry Frankfurt, but not in Lippitt.<sup>128</sup> I have defended (G) against Williams' argument for the possibility of “authentic aestheticism,” as I called this objection to (G).<sup>129</sup> But perhaps that label would be more apt for the view that “the aesthete's life has all the ‘meaning’ that he needs,” as Lippitt puts it<sup>130</sup> – that an aesthetic life can be sufficiently rich in personal meaning without giving priority or central place to ethical norms that regulate our personal projects and relationships. This second objection to thesis (G) is connected to the first to the extent that the meaningfulness of a life to its agent is enhanced by his personal autonomy; but they are not quite the same objection, since the connection between autonomy and authentic life-meaning is complex. I have also defended (F) directly in my book on willing as end-setting, where I try to show that it is compatible both with attention to diverse values and with the existential importance of openness to novelty.<sup>131</sup> But these points, and their relation to Kierkegaard, will be more readily apparent if we first consider a direct argument from conditions of autonomy to important kinds of narrative coherence beyond unity-1.

### **Narrative Unity-2 and Personal Autonomy: MacIntyre, Frankfurt, and Kierkegaard.**

If we start from a narrativist like MacIntyre, the link claimed in thesis (F) is not immediately obvious, but a version of (G) linking authenticity and ethical consciousness is explicitly defended. In critiquing Sartre's negative account of "integrity" as refusal of conventional social roles and relations, MacIntyre implies that his own account explains authentic agency in terms of virtues: to possess a virtue requires a strong disposition to exhibit it in many "different types of situation," and this unity of virtue across domains of action "is intelligible only as a characteristic of a unitary life."<sup>132</sup> But "the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death" is not a sufficient condition for such strong character; it is only the necessary condition of unity-1. The unity of a virtuous life requires "longest-term intentions" within which short-term action-plans are intelligible,<sup>133</sup> and these are implicit or explicit answers to the question of "how best I might live out that unity" that is my life and "bring it to completion."<sup>134</sup> In my terms, the question is: how should I develop my narrative from its constitutive unity-1 to a higher unity-2 through pursuit of various goods? Although MacIntyre does not formally distinguish these types of unity, he implies that the relevant thick unity is found in "a conception of *the good*" through which we can order other goods in our life over time.<sup>135</sup> Such an authentic identity clearly involves reflection on what makes for a meaningful life, and a conception of how one's own life fits into the larger stories of practices and traditions.<sup>136</sup> MacIntyre does not specifically add second-order volitions to this identity, although it must move beyond the basic prereflective level of narrative because participation in practices and traditions involves reflecting how their standards and conception of their ends have developed over time. Such an authentic identity is a social and historical identity, but MacIntyre avoids terms like "autonomy" with their individualistic connotations.<sup>137</sup>

Yet showing that personal autonomy involves kinds of narrative unity beyond unity-1 may provide a conception that is better able to calm narrato-skeptical worries about the unity of ends in a "whole life." Suppose we start with a "hierarchical" approach to personal autonomy like that Gerald Dworkin's or Harry Frankfurt's initial models from the early 1970s. According to them, an agent is autonomous when she acts on first-order motives with which she identifies, where volitional "identification" with a motive M1 reduces to desiring to act on M1, or endorsing M1 through unmanipulated critical reflection about it, or regarding M1 as expressive of the character one wishes to exhibit (the opposite of seeing M1 as "alien").<sup>138</sup> There are well-known problems with these models, but they are mitigated if we reconceive "alienation" from M1 in terms of fighting against it in favor of competing first-order motives with which we identify, and interpret "identification" with a first-order motive as making an effort to acquire or sustain it because it fits with our cares and the practical judgments they embody.

Although this revised Frankfortian model of autonomy does not yet explicitly include motivation by ethical standards, it captures much of what distinguishes the "ethical" existence-sphere from the "aesthetic" existential attitude, according to Kierkegaard. My work on the prereligious stages of Kierkegaardian selfhood argues that "aesthetes" typically lack specific, positive higher-order volitions through which they would become responsible for a practical identity with substantive content by shaping it through definite commitments to ends of lasting value; and more advanced aesthetes intentionally try to remain in this state of "wantonness" by avoiding such commitments.<sup>139</sup> By contrast, as Judge William says, the individual enters the "ethical" orientation or frame of reference by striving from his "actual self" towards his "ideal self" (EO 2: 259). His reflexive volitional attitudes express the "exemplary self" (Ibid) or character he wills<sub>2</sub> to develop out of the contingent aptitudes, personality traits, and social

circumstances that are given to his life from birth and upbringing (the passive beginning of his narrative). "Sovereignty over himself" or personal autonomy consists in the individual's

becoming conscious as this specific individual with these capacities, these inclinations, these drives, these passions, influenced by this specific social milieu, as this specific product of a specific environment. But as he becomes aware of all of this, he takes upon himself responsibility for all of it ... [and] chooses himself as a product. ...An individual thus chooses himself as a complex specific concretion and therefore chooses himself in his *continuity* (EO 2: 251; my italics).

In other words, the product of his volitional work on his own psyche flows temporally out of his facticity and into tasks that will continue over time. Thus by higher-order will, the individual "can gain a history,...can give this history continuity," not via biographical summary but by imbuing his story with freedom (EO 2: 250). This is the continuity of repeated choice or volitional effort that makes the resulting practical identity free in the positive sense of autonomy. His narrative now expresses an "ethical life view" in the sense that it tries to shape the given elements according to values that he sees as having objective authority for his ongoing tasks. In order to create a new "self" in this sense, "in the direction of continuity" rather than in mystic isolation or abstraction from temporal succession, the individual must be "transparent to himself" in a way that aesthetes are not. He "knows himself, penetrates his whole concretion with his consciousness" (EO 2: 258) because higher-order volition requires critical reflection on one's first-order motives and traits.

It is clear that on this conception of autonomy, its volitional component directly entails a type of narrative continuity beyond the constitutive level, since unity-1 includes intentional but wanton acts that flow from accidental motives which the agent has never autonomously taken up. For example, as Norman Lillgard argues, Kierkegaard thinks that the character Claudine in Fru Gyllembourg's *Two Ages* fails to take active charge of her character according to a "motivational self-concept" or "life view" which would involve higher-order volitions guided by ethical norms.<sup>140</sup> She plans and acts, but she has not "ethically chosen and found" herself or taken the formation of her identity as her "objective" (EO 2: 262). By contrast, volitional identification involves a thicker narrative conception of who we should be that is guided by ethical values.

In turn, my revision of Frankfurt supports these Kierkegaardian claims. If higher-order volitions are components of "cares" that define "our will" (in the sense of essentially autonomous motives),<sup>141</sup> then the intrinsic connection between autonomy and thick narrative unity follows from the nature of caring itself. For, as I've argued, caring in the volitional sense (i) involves commitment actively sustained over time by the agent's own efforts, and must be based on the agent's conviction that (ii) the goals or individuals to which he is committed are *worth caring about*, or that (iii) the *process* of caring about these ends and pursuing related projects is itself inherently valuable, or both.<sup>142</sup> The first of these points supports thesis (F), while the latter two support thesis (G). On this objectivist account, the kind of caring that is existentially central -- that gives life first-personal meaning -- necessarily involves caring<sub>2</sub> that the values on which our commitments, life-goals, and central relationships are based (or could be based) are rightly discerned, not mere phantoms. For we cannot sustain the motivation required for pursuit of complex and challenging ends or rich human relationships while believing that in themselves, such goals and relationships are pointless, or that all their value is imposed by our accidental desires, or result from manipulation by others. Our second-order concern that our cares are well-

grounded requires that the values to which they are loyal, and which they express, are not false or intrinsically meaningless. We do not have the power to invent meanings or impose values and retain a stable sense of their significance despite believing that ultimately, meaning and value are just shadows of brute preferences or attitudes we have without any practical justification.<sup>143</sup> If this is correct, then the *stability and constancy* that are essential to earnest caring, as opposed to its fickle simulacra, is a response to what we take to be enduring practical realities outside the self, which involve the social world. Thus the kind of caring that is central to a meaningful life has a narrative structure that depends on a larger, shared (though constantly debated and refined) story concerning what is worth caring about in life. About this, Taylor and MacIntyre are correct.

**Replies to Christman and Lippitt: from Unity-2 to Unity-3.** We can now define unity-2 more precisely as the volitional continuity that emerges from the self-sustaining diachronic form of the cares through which our practical identity governs more short-term plans, courses of action and emotional responses to circumstances affecting what we care about. A person who forms lasting cares (the strongest variety of which are "ground projects" for which she'd be willing to die) brings thematic unity to many aspects of her life and the meaning that many of her activities have for her. Thus she has a type of narrative unity that is lacking in wantons and in the simpler sorts of aesthetes. Imagine a rich Don Juan who pursues one-night stands without reflection on his character, or an artist who enjoys her natural talent for piano and lives off this skill without any devotion to artistic excellence for its own sake. Their lives may appear outwardly simpler than the lives of agents whose cares risk deeper sorts of conflict, but that is because they are lacking the most important level of practical identity.

This level of commitment to ends beyond oneself for longer periods of time opens up the possibility of at least two new kinds of tension. Caring agents face *instrumental* conflicts between cares that cannot be pursued simultaneously, or that compete for scarce resources (either external or psychological), given their particular circumstances or the situation of human life in general. These conflicts require what I'll call "pragmatic" resolution by trying to prioritize, to find ways to pursue one's projects together, to discern which is more likely to succeed, etc. We have to "balance" them in phronetic judgment.<sup>144</sup> Second, a person's cares may conflict *essentially* if they are based on inconsistent strong evaluations (in Charles Taylor's sense<sup>145</sup>) of goals and pursuits. By expressing opposed values, each care directly undermines the other: even given ideal external circumstances for pursuing both, the internal conflict saps our motivation for either of them. I've described these tensions in their synchronic form, though they can also be felt as diachronic problems of continuity.

Although he did not clearly distinguish these two types of conflict among cares, Frankfurt saw that a person's higher-order volitions, or the cares in which they are embedded, can conflict: his higher-order will itself is then "ambivalent" because it identifies him with inconsistent first-order desires A1 and B1.<sup>146</sup> A person in this state is more autonomous than a wanton in acting on either A1 or B1. Likewise, in his accounts of "spirit" and "sin," Kierkegaard recognized that someone can make real commitments or will in the way that tends to illuminate the relevance of ethical ideals for character, yet remain divided in his will. I have argued that different species of such "halfheartedness" explain all of the following: "heroic aesthetes" who are outwardly devoted to some great work or excellence in a practice; agents who only partially repent of some error; agents who will to remain alienated from some of their operative motives or to continue with essentially inconsistent cares; and those demonically opposed to the good.<sup>147</sup> All these types have

volitionally developed forms of narrative continuity that are lacking in simple aesthetes. For example, Haufniensis writes that the demonic agent appears to have “an extraordinary continuity” when compared to the “vapid, enervating dissolution” of the lowest aesthete who is “continually absorbed in the impression.”<sup>148</sup> Yet their continuity is still subject to sudden reversals, because they lack the coherence among their cares that Frankfurt calls “wholeheartedness.”<sup>149</sup> Negatively, a wholehearted care must not be in essential conflict with any other care; positively, it requires full devotion of one’s volitional energies to the care, consistent with our practical identity as a whole. Understood this way, my wholehearted caring for a project or person does not require that they be my highest priority, or even that the care is a “ground project” in Williams’s sense that I would die for it. Our wholehearted cares (even those that are ground projects) can be rank-ordered, and be or less meaningful to us. The great importance of prioritizing them or otherwise reducing pragmatic/circumstantial conflicts between pursuit of them all comes from our unambiguous devotion to *each* of them. We are then fully autonomous in acting on any of our wholehearted cares, even if we do not succeed in striking a good pragmatic balance between them. Thus the synchronic dimension of unity among our identity-constituting cares is compatible with a certain amount of diachronic disunity in our planning and follow-through.

So understood, wholeheartedness in our higher-order volitions or existential coherence among our cares is a further level of narrative unity that we can call unity-3. Kierkegaard holds that the conditions of earnest willing point towards this kind of strong unity as part of the telos of selfhood. Against this conception our existential telos, Lippitt notes John Christman’s argument that an agent’s life can be sufficiently meaningful to her in virtue of *separate* projects with no intrinsic relation to one another, forming no overall “grand scheme.”<sup>150</sup> Yet wholeheartedness does not require such a grand single purpose; it can be realized in harmony between the main themes of our life established by our primary cares. This point is aptly made in both of Rudd’s responses:

For most people, what unifies their life is not one project among others (e.g. a successful career) which is given overriding importance, but rather an attempt to lead a fulfilling, satisfying life. This is characteristically achieved in and through all the particular projects I pursue, not as one more particular project on the same level as them.<sup>151</sup>

This is exactly right; whether we conceive our telos as a flourishing life, or as a meaningful life, wholeheartedness is a higher-order end regulating other projects and commitments, not to be confused with the goals constitutive of practices or other finite goods at which first-order cares appropriately aim. Call this (H) the *regulative thesis* about unity-3. As we will see, it is crucial to Kierkegaard’s account of “purity of heart.” In his second paper, Rudd develops the harmony idea:

in aiming, as I do, at various distinct goals, I have to take into account that they are all things that *I* am trying to achieve, and that how I set about one project will inevitably be affected by how I set about others. A typical life-narrative will not be the story of the pursuit of one single goal, but the story of how the protagonist attempts (successfully or not) to coordinate his/her different projects and goals with one another.<sup>152</sup>

Indeed it would be a pragmatic contradiction to care about different ends and relationships and not care about their practical relationship in the one life I have to live. As noted above, caring about existential coherence is necessarily involved in expressive devotion to first-order apprehended as

worth caring about.

The objectivist account of caring makes this especially clear with regard to essential conflicts in valuation: since our distinct projects involve commitments to goals made in light of putatively objective values, a person cannot just turn them off and on in different domains of her life without autonomy-undermining self-manipulation. In this sense, autonomous projects are not rationally separable. In fact, Christman's own account of autonomy leads to the same conclusion. For Christman holds that an agent's projects and motives are autonomous if "hypothetically, the person could reflect upon them without repudiation in light of how they came about."<sup>153</sup> In other words, we would endorse, or at least not reject, the motives and values on which our various life-projects are based, even if we knew their causal origins in the history of our psyche. But if this endorsement (or non-rejection) involves objective value-judgments, it requires consistency to be even minimally rational. And Christman has rightly been persuaded by authors such as Marilyn Friedman and Diana Meyers that in addition to endorsement or non-alienation, autonomy requires various kinds of competence, including rationality:

An autonomous agent must be at least minimally rational in the sense of having a belief and desire set that does not contain manifest inconsistencies. Manifest inconsistencies are those that would involve manifest conflicts among beliefs (or values, etc.) if brought to consciousness. A related requirement is that the agent not suffer from self-deception: The autonomous person cannot be under the influence of desires or motives that are part of mere "cover stories" for other, incompatible and more deeply held, desires and motives.<sup>154</sup>

For example, if I am devoted to two different projects P1 and P2, and they are based on strong evaluations Ev1 and Ev2, then Ev1 and Ev2 must at least be consistent if I am to count as fully autonomous when I act on either project, according to Christman. For if these strong evaluations conflict, then P1 and P2 are the result of incompetent or self-deceptive agency.<sup>155</sup> Some problems remain with Christman's criteria for autonomy, since they cannot rule out the possibility of being manipulated into endorsing the genesis of my desires and values. But if this is solved by adopting an objectivist conception of cares that rules out such manipulation, his account will agree with the narrative theorist's central claim that the cares, ground projects, or commitments that give the agent a thick practical identity have to be *coherent* in the specific sense of being based on mutually consistent strong evaluations.<sup>156</sup> As Rudd acknowledges, it may be difficult to balance our different projects and concerns, given the contingencies of life, but the values to which we are responding in these cares cannot be in *essential* conflict: rather, it is because Ev1 and Ev2 fit together in some larger evaluative stance that our response to them in pursuing P1 and P2 must also fit together, that we are responsible for balancing them as best as the contingencies of life and our abilities allow.

This analysis helps answer several of Lippitt's objections. Since authentic caring requires honesty with ourselves about our commitments, their priority in our life, and their grounds,<sup>157</sup> the thick narrative unity involved in autonomy and ethical life is incompatible with self-deceptive stories about one's practical identity. *Akrasia* in understanding our own will, false "good conscience," and self-indulgent illusions about our motives and commitments may be hard to avoid, but they are pragmatically inconsistent with the necessary cognitive basis for sustainable devotions and pursuits. The agent who relies on such delusions is pragmatically self-defeating; her practical identity and sense of life-meaning are destabilized by failure to live up to the norms

constitutive of caring as such. However long luck allows it to continue, her self-conception is liable to rapid collapse under any significant pressure from external reality.

Lippitt notes that I was not sufficiently clear about what counts as "essential" conflict in responding to Quinn, and he doubts that this concept is enough to give us a type of narrative unity that "mature agency" requires.<sup>158</sup> A devotion to pedophilia is obviously inconsistent with the cares of a good parent,<sup>159</sup> and the committed Klansman who knowingly marries an African-American woman faces a conflict that is not merely pragmatic. But Lippitt thinks that other cases may be less obvious; he offers an agent who pursues both philosophy and novel-writing while knowing he risks failing at both. Now this is an instrumental conflict; though the stakes are high, an agent who risked pursuing both could be wholehearted and thus fully autonomous in doing so. Failing at both, either as a result of bad luck or poor instrumental reasoning, does not threaten unity-3, though it would make for a very sad narrative. The conflict between cares may be harder to classify in some cases, but that would simply show that we need to sharpen our conception of "strong evaluation." In addition, satisfying the negative condition for wholeheartedness (lack of essential conflict) will not be enough to yield "a unified life-narrative by default," as Lippitt fears;<sup>160</sup> for the positive conditions of wholeheartedness must also be satisfied. That does not require that I "bring each and every aspect of my life under one grand narrative,"<sup>161</sup> if that means seeing them all as means to one first-order end, or ranking them all under a single priority principle. It does mean caring enough about their pragmatic compatibility and their worth that I'm open to reconsidering my ways of pursuing them, to constructive critiques of their perceived grounds, and to unplanned discoveries of value that could lead to new cares.

This answers Lippitt's question concerning why an autonomous agent must be concerned about existential coherence or wholeheartedness.<sup>162</sup> For a caring agent who lacked this concern would be like the parent who said he loved each of his children but thought nothing of his family – i.e. he would be guilty of a practical fallacy of division. We can certainly "imagine such an individual" who is not committed to practical unification,<sup>163</sup> but we'll have to imagine her as volitionally self-undermining. Golda Meier, we are told, was not able to integrate her marriage with her unceasing devotion to creating and preserving the nation of Israel.<sup>164</sup> However, suppose she had said that she cared both for her husband and her chosen country, but didn't care less that they were pulling her in different directions; we would rightly wonder what such a statement could even mean, for it borders on gibberish. Or imagine an Abraham Lincoln who claimed to care both about the moral wrong of slavery and about loyalty to constitutional order as essential to the rule of law, but who then told Thaddeus Stevens that he had no interest in reconciling them in the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Surely Thad would then have doubted that Lincoln *really* cared about both, or either. The regulative concern for coherence is manifested precisely in the importance we give to reducing pragmatic conflict.

**The Aesthetic and Ethical Stages Restated.** Thus the direct argument from autonomy to the narrative continuity of caring extends on to unity-3: cares need to be governed by a coherent view of the values that serve as grounds for actual and possible cares, which in turn helps our higher-order volitions become wholehearted. But to care<sub>2</sub> about such an encompassing evaluative view that makes wholehearted caring possible is virtually tantamount to caring<sub>2</sub> about "the ethical." To get to Kierkegaard's thesis (G), we only need to add that evaluative coherence cannot be reached without some norms that trump other values, or that *obligate* in the moral sense. Then the recognition of ethical norms will be tied logically and dynamically to caring wholeheartedly

about other (non-moral) ends. Agents who begin to form autonomous cares find that attentiveness to the values grounding these cares makes salient broader ethical considerations for ordering cares together. Thus Judge William's belief that a person who commits with pathos will discover his error if his choice is ethically mistaken (EO 2:167) may not be an irenic fantasy. Values worth caring about are fully intelligible only in terms of a larger ethical framework, which is why an agent who cares but who denies the application of ethical obligations to her practical identity is missing latent implications of her own commitments.<sup>165</sup>

However, an important issue remains about how these distinctions map onto Kierkegaard's many remarks (pseudonymous and signed) about the "aesthetic" and the "ethical." In an effort to disconnect theses (F) and (G), Lippitt argues that we cannot explain the superiority of the ethical in terms of narrative "unity or coherence *per se*." He points out that Judge William acknowledges that aesthetes who pursue "wealth, glory, nobility, and the development of a special talent" do find a certain coherence in their temporal goal (EO 2:183).<sup>166</sup> He also notes that the young man "A" is more sophisticated, and we might add that A has a more abstract aesthetic project, namely to avoid boredom by seeking the entertainment-value in everything.<sup>167</sup>

The Judge counters that in going beyond the simple aesthetes who pursue pleasure, honor, wealth, and talents by seeing the "vanity" of their goals (EO 2:194), A is aware of lacking any more significant or lasting purpose that could give meaning to his life: thus he is in "thought-despair" (EO 2:195). A is inwardly distanced from all particular human interactions and tasks; even though he cannot entirely avoid them, he does not identify with them, and he tries to immerse himself in the moment (EO 2:201). He does not sincerely will an ideal for his character, and so the Judge tells him, "the coherence in your view is broken" (EO 2:202). This is why I wrote that aesthetes who are "awakened" to the existential need for a deeper identity do will something – if they do not form specific commitments, they subsist in a shadowy, negative determination not to form any positive cares concerning any concrete role, end, or task in the finite world.<sup>168</sup> The character A is in a kind of 'holding pattern' as he tries to avoid landing in any determinate cares, and thus to avoid making the primordial choice to give ethical ideals purchase on his identity; his project resists rather than establishes an earnest character maintained by higher-order volitions. Thus the Judge denies that "aesthetic earnestness" is really possible. When such an individual

...sets a task for his life, it is really the task of becoming absorbed in his own accidental traits, of becoming an individual whose equal in paradoxicality and irregularity has never been seen, of becoming a caricature of a human being. The reason we rarely meet such characters in life is that we rarely meet people who have a notion of what it is to live (EO 2:261).

In other words, A is above the unawakened aesthete because he *does* have some notion of what robust practical identity requires, but he is trying to avoid it by creating a self-deceptive persona designed to fascinate himself and others with its aesthetic qualities. "You are sentimental, heartless, all according to the circumstances; but during all this, you are at all times only in the moment, and for that reason your life disintegrates, and it is impossible for you to explain it" (EO 2:179). For honest recognition of how his psychological stratagem works would ruin it. The same would seem to apply to Johannes the Seducer's abstract project of cultivating "the interesting" in all things,<sup>169</sup> although the Judge does not specifically address his perverse way of instrumentalizing all emotions. But we might then think that simpler aesthetes have a narrative unity that is impossible for dandied sentimentalists like A and Johannes. Moreover, careful

readers will have spotted that I twice recognized a type of apparently "heroic" aesthete who ignores morality or denies that it governs his ground projects but still cares about particular ends and roles, identifying with desires for various kinds of greatness. Unlike A and Johannes, such heroic aesthetes do not seek to evade positive higher-order volition entirely by complex self-deception.

So Lippitt is right that the simplest formulations of the aesthetic-ethical distinction offered by Rudd and I do not capture its full complexity; these definitions are only first approximations. But they can be improved in light of the levels of narrative unity distinguished above. We can show how by responding to Lippitt's most challenging and poignant example. In arguing, rightly, that it is unusual for us to consider directly the meaningfulness of our "whole life," he adds

But even in such moments – which are relatively rare – intelligibility is not the issue. When my wife has left me, my teenage daughter has told me that she'll never speak to me again, and I have lost my job, all in the same week, I might well face despair in a more everyday sense than Kierkegaard's. But even in such circumstances, I would be able to offer a perfectly intelligible narrative about why I married this woman; why I intervened to try and discourage my daughter from dating that Neanderthal suspected drug-pusher; why I took that job despite my knowledge of its insecurity. Intelligibility is not the problem.... [So] the concept of intelligibility will certainly not enable us to distinguish aesthetes from ethicists.<sup>170</sup>

That is correct for the kind of intelligibility involved in planning agency in general: unity-1 need not be lost in such an unfortunate series of events.<sup>171</sup> For simple aesthetes and care-evasive skeptics and sophisticates, the problem is lack of unity-2. If they experienced such misfortunes and did not despair of aestheticism, they could remain in it by dropping their old ties without regret, or by making light of the situation, or regarding the significant others in the story as fungible and seeking quick replacements, or even perversely romanticizing the rejections and focusing on the aesthetic aspects of their situation (e.g. finding the interesting in a wounded ego). Most people would see such cavalier reactions as deeply suspect because they lack ethical depth; they do not express ongoing commitments of deep significance to the agent; if he had such commitments, he would be profoundly affected by the losses. In a word, his reactions are *careless*; such an agent could go on more easily than most just because he lacked the deeper volitional sort of continuity. Someone who drops a love-relation without the slightest emotional response surely had no identity-defining love at all. By contrast, experiencing earnest grief and needing time to repair one's narrative with new goals might look like disunity on the surface but would actually reflect retained recognition of the values expressed by those earlier cares, and their significance within a broader matrix of values.

This is exactly the earnest emotion we find in Lippitt's description. And true to the Judge's prediction about volitional caring, it is clear that Lippitt's protagonist experiences these problems precisely *as ethical* -- as serious because of their importance to the well-being of others, and as existentially central to his life. The caring agent is pushed towards infinite resignation by this kind of plight. An "heroic" aesthete would suffer similarly from a breakdown or clash of his central projects, but would lack the ethical framework through which new cares can be developed that count as continuations of the old ones, faithful to what was right in them, loyal to the same ultimate values. Such aesthetes can thus manifest unity-2 for protracted periods in life, but they cannot become wholehearted while they refuse to recognize the unifying ethical frame of

reference within which the values they serve are situated and rooted. Hence the ethical stage is distinguished from *all* subtypes of the aesthetic only by unity-3 in Kierkegaard's analysis. That is why unity-3 is the topic of Kierkegaard's signed account of ethical selfhood in his discourse on "Purity of Heart." But that is a topic for another occasion.

**Conclusion.** Lippitt's searching questions about the notion of "narrative" as applied to human lives and his objections to overly quick ways of assimilating ethical identity to life as a "unified whole" in contrast to aesthetic "disunity" have prompted important clarifications and developments. I have recommended a strong form of narrative realism about practical identity as the solution to the central dilemma in the debate; but even if one prefers a weaker metaphysical conception of life-narratives, the phenomenological distinction between different levels of narrative unity and their relation to different types of motives must be considered. These distinctions, when combined with a conception of caring that emphasizes its implicit basis in objection value judgments or perceptions, explains the internal connection between levels of autonomous motivation (or personal "authority") and types of narrative coherence, both synchronic and diachronic. A simple version of Kierkegaard's distinction between the aesthetic as "wanton" or non-autonomous and the ethical as earnest in devotion or care then maps onto an important difference in diachronic continuity of will. Recognizing the different types of aesthetes in Kierkegaard's writings complicates this picture, but the result remains consistent with an enriched narrative model: aesthetes of every type, including the heroic, lack "wholeheartedness" properly understood as devotion of one's full energies without essential inconsistency in the values grounding one's cares. Lippitt's understandable concerns about self-deceptive autobiographies, monomania and fanaticism, and openness to novel perspectives in light of which one might change ground projects, can all be answered in a narrative account of practical identity by the importance of well-based values for commitments that, unlike mere sentimentalism, reach beyond pleasing self-images or the familiar and comfortable toward 'what really matters most.'

The connection Kierkegaard draws between seriousness of purpose in life and personal appropriation of an ethical framework to govern our cares remains controversial, but it is just as intelligible as Charles Taylor's similar claims that authentic identity is defined against the background of horizons of shared value-contrasts transcending measures of desire-satisfaction. Kierkegaard's further claim that the will is not completely wholehearted until it reaches the point of "infinite resignation" is another step in this development that, like the special problem that mortality poses to narrative theories, must be treated separately. In other words, even with the chapters added here, the story of narrative selfhood remains incomplete.

1. See John Lippitt, Review of *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, ed. Davenport and Rudd, *Faith and Philosophy* 22 no.4 (Oct. 2005): 496-502; Lippitt, "Telling Tales: Johannes Climacus and 'Narrative Unity'" in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2005*, ed. Niels J. Cappelorn, (Walter de Gruyter): 71-89; and Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight: Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, and Some Problems with Narrative Unity," *Inquiry* 50 no.1 (Feb. 2007): 34-69.
2. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984)
3. Anthony Rudd, "Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, and Narrative Unity -- Reply to Lippitt," *Inquiry* 50 no.5 (Oct. 2007): 541-49; and Rudd, "In Defense of Narrative," *European Journal of Philosophy* (2007) 17 no1 (March 2009): 60-75. Also see Rudd's forthcoming book on self and identity, ch.7.
4. However, full development of this approach responding to narrato-skeptics in the mainstream debates will be left for a separate article, in order to leave space to address Kierkegaard and the special problem of death here.
5. For a sample of such discussions, see the "Personal Identity" entry by Carsten Korfmacher on the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. For some interesting essays on the theoretical question, see *Self-Knowledge*, ed. Quassim Cassam (Oxford Readings in Philosophy, 1994). But also see Trenton Merricks, "There Are No Criteria of Identity Over Time," *Noûs* 32 no.1 (1998): 106-24.
6. See Daniel Dennett, "The Origin of Selves," *Cogito* 3 (1989): 163-73; the "Reality of Selves" in *Consciousness Explained* (Little, Brown, and Co, 1991): ch.13; "The Self as the Center of Narrative Gravity," in *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, ed. Kessel, Cole, and Johnson (Erlbaum Associates, 1993). And see Owen Flanagan, *Consciousness Reconsidered* (MIT Press, 1991), chs. 9-10; and Flanagan, "Multiple Identity, Character Transformation, and Self-Reclamation," in *Self-Expressions* (Oxford University Press, 1996): 65-87.
7. See Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford University Press, 1984, corrected pb. 1987), chs. 10-14.
8. See Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. A.O. Rorty (1973); reprinted in Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers, 1973-1980* (Cambridge University Press, 1981): 1-19, esp. pp.8-11.
9. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p.217.
10. David Carr, "Ricoeur on Narrative," A Roundtable Discussion by Carr, Taylor, and Ricoeur (1985), reprinted in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (Routledge, 1991): 160-87, p.163.
11. For instance, Lippitt asks, "In exactly what does the 'narrative unity' of a life consist? ... The concept of narrative at work in several of the essays needs to be clarified" – see Lippitt, "Review of *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*," p.498. Compare Lippitt, "Telling Tales," p.73, pp.76-77; and Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p.36: "A large part of the problem with talk of 'narrative' in general is the variety of ways the term gets defined (when it is defined at all)."
12. See Lippitt, "Review of *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*," p.501, on Lillegard's discussion of dimensional and chronological wholeness; Lippitt, "Telling Tales," pp.77-79.; and Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," pp.43-51.

13. See Lippitt, "Review of *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*," p.497, on Jeff Turner's point that "The desire to 'tell a good tale' about our lives renders us prone to self-deception." Compare Lippitt, "Telling Tales," p.72, p.85; and Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," pp.48-49.
14. See Lippitt, "Review of *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*," p.499; and Lippitt, "Telling Tales," p.78: "Given the slipperiness of the term, is there really anyone whose life lacks narrative unity of a certain kind?" Compare Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p.38 and p.40.
15. See Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," pp.52-58.
16. See Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p.51, and Lippitt, "Telling Tales," p.79.
17. See Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," pp.45-46,
18. Marya Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View," in *Narrative Understanding and Persons*: 155-78. Schechtman distinguishes "three basic questions for the narrative theorist: (1) What counts as a life-narrative? (2) What counts as having a narrative? (3) What are the practical implications of having (or failing to have) a narrative?" (p.159). Her first question corresponds to (1) and (2) on my list, but her second and third concern the further types of unity critiqued in objections (3) and (4) on my list.
19. Rudd, "Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, and Narrative Unity," p.542.
20. See Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity," *Ratio* 16 (2004): 428-52.
21. Rudd, "Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, and Narrative Unity," p.543.
22. Ibid, p.544.
23. Rudd, "In Defense of Narrative," p.62.
24. Carlos Moya, *The Philosophy of Action* (Polity Press/Blackwell, 1990), pp.46-47.
25. Ibid, p.48.
26. Ibid, pp.57-58.
27. Ibid, p.61.
28. Ibid, p.62.
29. Ibid, p.64.
30. Michael Bratman, *Faces of Intention* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), Introduction pp.1-6. Also see Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Harvard University Press, 1987).
31. See David J. Velleman, *Practical Reflection* (Princeton University Press, 1999), esp. chs 3-4. For example, he summarizes his view as follows: "I have identified intentions with self-fulfilling expectations that are motivated by a desire for their fulfillment and that represent themselves as such" (p.109). This account certainly captures some interesting features of intentional action, although it leaves

too little room for action that is intentional yet not autonomous.

32. Ibid, p.111.

33. David Velleman, "The Self as Narrator," in *Autonomy and the Challenges of Liberalism*, ed. John Christman and Joel Anderson (Cambridge University Press, 2005): 56-75.

34. See Davenport, "Fischer and Ravizza on Moral Sanity and Weakness of Will," *The Journal of Ethics* 6 (2002): 235-59.

35. Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p.50.

36. Rudd, "In Defense of Narrative," p.62.

37. *V for Vendetta* (Warner Bros, 2007), dr. James MacTeigue, prod. Joel Silver, screenplay Andy and Larry Wachowski; based on a ten-issue comic book written by Alan Moore in the 1980s.

38. Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival," p.161. Her definition of "weak" unity as "a fundamental implicit knowledge of the events in her history" (p.160) is probably close to unity-0 in my sense, while her "middle-range" unity is probably closer to unity-1.

39. Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p.51.

40. See Davenport, "The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical," *Southwest Philosophy Review* 11 no.2 (August, 1995): 73-108, revised and reprinted in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays in Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, ed. Davenport and Rudd (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 2001): 75-112, esp. pp.81-83 where I say that aesthetes satisfy MacIntyre's basic requirements for intelligibility.

41. Laura Ekstrom, "Alienation, Autonomy, and the Self," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XXIX (2005): 45-67, p.57. Also see Ekstrom, "A Coherence Theory of Autonomy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 no.3 (Sept. 1993): 599-616.

42. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p.197.

43. Bernard Williams, "Life as Narrative," *European Journal of Philosophy* (Sept 2007 online preprint), p.1 (my italics).

44. Ibid, p.2.

45. Ibid, p.3.

46. Ibid, p.5.

47. Ibid, p.6.

48. Ibid.

49. See Davenport "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre" in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*: 265-324, p.282.

50. Williams, "Life as Narrative," p.8.
51. Davenport, "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics," p.283 and *Will as Commitment and Resolve* (Fordham University Press, 2007), ch.13.
52. Ibid, pp.6-7.
53. See, respectively, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and Tolkien's *The Two Towers*, ch.8.
54. Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p.43. Here Lippitt actually lists three main objections to MacIntyre, which correspond to objections (2), (6), and (3) on my list respectively.
55. Ibid, p.45.
56. Ibid, p.46, citing Stephen Mulhall, "The Enigma of Individuality: Identity, Narrative, and Truth in Biography, Autobiography, and Fiction," in Richard Eldridge, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2009), forthcoming.
57. David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Indiana University Press, 1986), p.57.
58. Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p.59.
59. Ibid, p.48, quoting Peter Lamarque, "On not expecting too much from narrative," *Mind and Language* 19 no.4 (2004): 393-408, pp.404-5 (my italics).
60. Ibid, p.48 (my italics).
61. For ingenious examples of this, see Ted Cohen's "Stories," Presidential Address to the Central Division of the APA, *Proceedings and Addresses of the APA* 81 no.2 (2008): 33-48.
62. For example, consider Richard Rorty's account in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).
63. Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005) , p.2. This book is based on King's *Massey Lectures*, broadcast on radio in Nov. 2003 as part of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's "Ideas" series.
64. Carr, "Ricoeur on Narrative," pp.161-62. Also see David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, Introduction.
65. Donald E. Polkinghorne, "Narrative and Personal Identity," in *Phenomenology and Narrative Psychology*, ed. Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center (Duquesne University Press, 2006): 25- 52, pp.25-26.
66. Ibid, p.32.
67. Ibid, p.33.
68. Ibid, p.34.

69. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p.214-15. His answer is that when fictionalists try to describe what raw "life" without narrative reconstruction is like, they are always forced to give "disjointed parts of some possible narrative," thus relying on the very phenomenon they deny (p.215). While this is true, the fictionalist can respond by getting more radical and claiming that MacIntyre's point just shows that "life" in the flow of time can't be described in language at all without imposing false structure and pseudo-intelligibility. Sartre himself arguably does imply some narrative structure as essential to the for-itself in his discussion of temporality later in *Being and Nothingness*.

70. Note that Lippitt himself does not seem to embrace either version of constructivism; he simply raises questions that drive some to accept a constructed narrative identity as the best we can hope for, while Lippitt seems to hope for more. Relative to thinkers who call themselves narrativists while in fact adopting a pure constructivist account of life-narratives, Lippitt's doubts seem much clearer and more honest.

71. Velleman, "The Self as Narrator," p.57, citing Dennett, "The Origin of Selves," *Cogito* 3 (1989): 163-73; the "Reality of Selves" in *Consciousness Explained* (Little, Brown, and Co, 1991): ch.13; "The Self as the Center of Narrative Gravity," in *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, ed. Kessel, Cole, and Johnson (Erlbaum Associates, 1993).

72. Ibid, p.58.

73. Ibid, pp.63-65.

74. Ibid, p.67.

75. Polkinghorne, "Narrative and Personal Identity," p.35.

76. Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, p.9

77. Ibid, p.16.

78. Ibid, p.29.

79. Ibid, p.33.

80. Ibid, p.41.

81. Ibid, p.47.

82. Ibid, p.49.

83. Ibid, p.14.

84. Carr, "Ricoeur on Narrative," p.169, citing *Time and Narrative*, vol.I, p.74.

85. Ibid, p.171.

86. Ibid, p.165.

87. See Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion*, and Richard Wollheim, *On the Emotions* (Yale University Press, 1999).
88. Carr, "Ricoeur on Narrative," p.166.
89. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3 (*Part IV: Narrated Time*), tr. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellaur (University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.16.
90. Ibid, pp.72-73.
91. Ibid, p.99.
92. Ibid, p.149.
93. Ibid, p.151.
94. Ibid, p.152.
95. Ibid, pp.153-54.
96. Ibid, p.246 (my italics).
97. Ricoeur conceives psychoanalysis as putting together the bits and pieces of an unbearably fragmented life-story into a "coherent and acceptable story in which the analysand can recognize his or her self-constancy" (Ibid, p.247). But what if the result is self-deceptive, as Lippitt rightly asks? We can solve this problem by noting the distinction between unity-1, which a patient might be helped to recognize in his history, and unity-2, which he might in fact have failed to achieve -- in which case, that is precisely what he needs to see and not to explain away.
98. Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur*: 20-33, p.28.
99. Ibid, p.29.
100. Ibid, p.30.
101. Rudd, "In Defense of Narrative," p.63. Compare his point that narrativists do not identify the self with "an explicitly formulated narrative of oneself that was complete, final, and wholly accurate," as if I had access to "God's biography of me" (p.6).
102. Ricoeur, contribution to "Ricoeur on Narrative," A Roundtable Discussion, in *On Paul Ricoeur*, p.180.
103. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 3, p.242, referring to *Time and Narrative* vol. I, Part II.
104. *Citizen Kane* (RKO Pictures/Mercury 1941), dir. Orson Wells, Welles, screenplay by Welles, Herman J. Mankiewicz, and John Houseman.
105. Of course there are many different interpretations of Rosebud too, and it possible to see Kane as "a fundamentally pathetic character -- that is, one not truly aware of what was happening to him;" see Bert Cardullo, "The Real Fascination of Citizen Kane," in Cardullo, *Indelible Images* (University Press of

America, 1987): 179-99, p.193. On this reading, Kane's narrative may have unity-1 but lacks the capacity for autonomy or unity-2.

106. I'm sure that my life has at least one such secret, hidden away in my earliest years, now barely accessible to consciousness. But I'm not sure exactly what it is; I can't tell my tale in full.

107. Lippitt, "Telling Tales," p.72.

108. Though again, this is literally true only of real persons; to reflect this difference with a fictional person requires contrasting an omniscient view of their life with a limited human view.

109. Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, p.123.

110. Rudd, "In Defense of Narrative," p.66.

111. Polkinghorne, p.28.

112. Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival," p.163.

113. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. ed., p.217.

114. Cheryl Misak, "Experience, Narrative, and Ethical Deliberation," *Ethics* 118 no.4 (July 2008): 614-32, p.618.

115. Ibid, p.623.

116. Ibid, p.625.

117. Ibid, pp.627-29.

118. Ibid, p.631.

119. Though he stresses the teleological nature of experience that results from planning agency, Rudd sees the nested webs of meaning in his response to Strawson's coffee-case: "Even the simplest of present actions carries with it levels of meaning which point into indefinite expanses of past and future," and "any particular narrative is embedded in a wider narrative" and can thus "always be extended" towards the unreachable limit of "ultimate intelligibility" (Rudd, "In Defense of Narrative," p.64).

120. Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival," p.163.

121. Ibid.

122. Lippitt, "Telling Tales," pp.75-76.

123. Note that Lippitt has in effect rejected the radical episodic view of mature agency in two places. First, in discussing Climacus and the infamous graveyard scene, Lippitt writes that "surely a 'whim' is an unpromising basis on which to build a life project. Could a life possessing 'narrative unity' be built on such a project?" ("Telling Tales," p.83). While I'm not sure that it is just a whim here, Lippitt's point is that identity-constituting commitments have to be based on more than whims to be sustainable. Second, Lippitt says, "To be sure, the Judge's recognition of the need for commitment in life is an important

insight” (“Getting the Story Straight,” p.40). Lippitt may be right that there are problems in the Judge's views about what we should commit to, and even that “A” sees these problems (though I think the latter is harder to sustain on textual grounds). But while we may not retain all the Judge’s 1<sup>st</sup>-order claims concerning what to care about, we should retain his second-order insight that caring in general is indispensable for a meaningful life. As I show, this insight has significant implications for unity-2.

124. Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. Lecture III. This is my rephrasing of Korsgaard’s argument in terms of an implicit commitment that is unavoidable for planning agents, which she should explain in terms of valuing the capacity to form practical identities. Unfortunately Korsgaard way of stating her argument makes it sound as if recognizing and *following* the moral law is a constitutive condition for unity-1 – this is the so-called “constitutivism problem.”

125. For example, Lippitt. “Getting the Story Straight,” p.35: “Judge William’s argument in fact contains far more in the way of substantive normative content than can be encapsulated in the idea of narrative unity.”

126. *Ibid*, pp.39-40.

127. See Lippitt’s points on the diversity among Kierkegaard’s aesthetes: “Getting the Story Straight,” pp.38-39 and p.42. Lippitt is right that “MacIntyrean Kierkegaardians” have tended to focus too much on the young man “A” in *Either/Or I*. However, the feature of lacking or resisting particular higher-order volitions, or substantive cares involving such volitions, is regarded as an aspect of “A” that distinguishes aestheticism in general, since the Judge in *Either/Or II* and Kierkegaard himself in *Two Ages* hold that ethical obligations on character or identity become personally significant for us when (and only when) we start *willing* in sense of care-sense. For a full defense of this claim, see my essay “Frankfurt and Kierkegaard on BS, Wantonness, and Aestheticism,” forthcoming in *Living Reasonably, Loving Well: Conversing with Frankfurt and Kierkegaard*, eds. Myron Penner and Søren Landkildehus.

128. See Frankfurt, “The importance of what we care about,” *Synthese*, 53 no.2 (1982); reprinted in Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge University Press, 1988): 80-94. In this essay, he claim that one can care earnestly about other things without caring about morality (p.81). This thesis is retained through his latest writings, e.g. *The Reasons of Love*. (Princeton University Press, 2004), p.9 and p.37.

129. See “Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics,” pp.294-300.

130. Lippitt. “Review of *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*,” p.499; he does not assert this view, but only asks what rules out this possibility.

131. See Davenport, *Will as Commitment and Resolve*, chs. 14 - 15.

132. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. ed., p.205.

133. *Ibid*, p.208.

134. *Ibid*, p.218.

135. *Ibid*, p.219.

136. Ibid, pp.222-23.

137. Ibid, pp.220-21.

138. Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." *Journal of Philosophy* 68 no.1 (January, 1971), reprinted in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge University Press, 1988): 11-25; and Gerald Dworkin, "Autonomy and Behavior Control," *Hastings Center Report* 6 no. 1 (February 1976): 23-28.

139. As we will see below, the "heroic aesthete" is the one exception to this formula.

140. Norman Lillegard, "Thinking with Kierkegaard and MacIntyre about Virtue," in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*: 211-32, pp.213-15. Higher-order volition is implicit in a "life view" on Lillegard's reading of Kierkegaard, with which I agree. Lippitt discusses Lillegard's points in his "Review of *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*," pp.500-1, but only raises objections to Lillegard's further points about infinite passions and infinite objects.

141. Frankfurt starts to use the term "will" in this sense in his essay on "The importance of what we care about," p.84.

142. Davenport, *Will as Commitment and Resolve*, chs. 13-14.

143. I think this is what Rick Furtak means by "living in a world of sustained value as moral agents:" see *Wisdom in Love* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), p.66. It is also part of Kierkegaard's critique of wilful despair in *Sickness Unto Death*; on this point, see Richard Johnson, "Neither Aristotle Nor Nietzsche," in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*: 151-72. Of course in defending objectivism, I'm departing from Frankfurt's own recent subjectivist account of caring in *The Reasons of Love* and related essays.

144. There is an implication in some of Lippitt's questions (e.g. "Telling Tales," pp.75-76, pp.79-80) that narrative unity theorists owe us a developed account of how diversity of interests and values are balanced with the need for focus, given the limits of our mental energies. I do not think there is a *special* burden on narrative theories in this regard, though; what we might call the "problem of pluralism" among values that are worth caring about is one that faces *every* theorist who tries to address practical normativity or "ethics" in the broad sense: it is a first-order ethical question. For example, Thomas Hurka provides an empirically and conceptually detailed theory of a "well-rounded life" in his *Perfectionism* (Oxford University Press, 1993) pp.84-98, and John Kekes, who Lippitt discusses, addresses this issue both in *Moral Wisdom and Good Lives* (Cornell University Press, 1995) and in *The Morality of Pluralism* (Princeton University Press, 1993). While agreeing with Kekes' pluralism, I have still argued against comprehensive eudaimonist theories in *Will as Commitment and Resolve*, ch.14. Narrative theorists could adopt a range of views on this question without threatening the basic theses that unite a narrative realist approach. Moreover, beyond detailing first-order ethical norms regarding diverse values, there is a level of casuistry or application involving detailed ethical advice or deliberation with regard to particular cases.

145. See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Harvard University Press, 1989), p.4 and Taylor, "What is Human Agency," in *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

146. Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," in *Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Ferdinand David Schoeman (Cambridge University Press, 1987); reprinted in *The Importance of What We Care About*: 159-76, p.166. He does imply that volitional ambiguity involves a conflict of strong evaluation when he writes that it is resolved not by simple

preference-ordering but "a radical separation of competing desires, on of which is not merely assigned a relatively less favored position but extruded entirely as an outlaw" (p.170). This amounts to strong evaluation, yet in other places, Frankfurt denies that higher-order volitions or cares require strong evaluation.

147. In Davenport, "Kierkegaard, Anxiety, and the Will," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 6, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and Jon Stewart (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, fall 2001): 158-81. The same claim is defended more briefly in "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics." Lippitt has raised interesting objections to it that I hope to answer below.

148. Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, pp.129-30.

149. Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," p.166; wholeheartedness is closely related to "decisive identification" (pp.168-69), and to "volitional necessity." This example of the demonic helps to show how synchronic disunity gets manifested in diachronic discontinuity.

150. Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," pp.46-47, citing Christman, "Narrative Unity as a Condition of Personhood."

151. Rudd, "Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, and Narrative Unity," p.545.

152. Rudd, "In Defense of Narrative," pp.64-65. Rudd seems to have both the negative and positive aspects of wholeheartedness in mind in this description of the coordination between projects.

153. John Christman, "Autonomy, Self-Knowledge, and Liberal Legitimacy," in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, ed. John Christman and Joel Anderson (Cambridge University Press, 2005): 330-58, p.333.

154. John Christman, "Procedural Autonomy and Liberal Legitimacy," in *Personal Autonomy*, ed. James S. Taylor (Cambridge University Press, 2005): 277-98, pp.78-79.

155. The only kind of conflict that would be allowed in the grounds of autonomous cares would be inconsistencies that were not apparent due to faultless lack of sufficient factual information.

156. This was the heart of my response to Philip Quinn's praise of discord and disunity as a way of allowing rich diversity to enter life: see "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics" in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, note 98, pp.320-21.

157. In a new essay comparing Frankfurt on bs. to Kierkegaard on idle talk, I argue that the implicit link between second-order caring and honesty-to-self in Frankfurt's work is explicitly brought out in Kierkegaard's critiques of inauthentic publicity and aestheticism: see "Frankfurt on BS, Sincerity, and Love: A Comparison With Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre," *op. cit.*

158. Lippitt, "Telling Tales," pp.74-80.

159. *Ibid.*, pp.74-75.

160. *Ibid.*, p.79. Thus the importance of narrative unity-3 does not imply that we should never risk tragic instrumental conflicts between our cares (*Ibid.*, p.80), though it does imply that we should not take on such risk lightly -- let alone seek it for its dramatic Dionysian effects.

161. Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p.46.

162. Lippitt, "Telling Tales," pp.74-76.

163. Ibid, p.75.

164. See *A Woman Called Golda* (1982; Paramount remastering, 1998), dir. Alan Gibson, screenplay by Harold Gast and Steve Gethers.

165. This answers Lippitt's question concerning how the Judge's arguments can reach someone who does not yet accept the authority of the ethical: see "Getting the Story Straight," pp.37-38. The persuasion depends on the type of aesthete. A person who is just careless has to be awoken to the existential importance of cares; a person who is avoiding higher-order volitions and strong evaluation has to see the emptiness of their negative project; a heroic aesthete has to be shown the way that her cares depend on a larger ethical framework to be fully meaningful.

166. Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p.40.

167. As we see in "The Rotation of Crops" in *Either/Or* vol. I. In other words, he focuses on the aesthetic values (including their originality, difference, oddity, comic aspects etc.) in any experience, while ignoring other relevant values that should be apprehended in these experiences. See my discussion in "Frankfurt and Kierkegaard on BS, Wantonness, and Aestheticism."

168. See Davenport, "The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical," p.95.

169. See "The Seducer's Diary" in *Either/Or* vol. I. Both A and the Seducer do explain a project, but not the way it operates as a defense-mechanism against the call of the ethical. Presumably we are supposed to imagine that the Judge does not know of the Diary discovered by A, although several of his descriptions of A in *Either/Or* vol.II sound strikingly as if he is describing Johannes. It is possible to argue that the Seducer's project is a more complex and perverse evasion than A's; on this topic, see my essay on inauthenticity in Frankfurt and Kierkegaard.

170. Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p.38.

171. An aesthete experiencing such misfortunes would not be in a position like the parents of Brenda Ann Spencer who in 1979 shot two adults, eight children, and police officer in San Diego because she did not like Mondays: "They can see no reasons, cause there are no reasons – what reasons do you need to be shown?," Bob Geldof cries in his famous song about the event.