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## Davenport, NARRATIVE IDENTITY, AUTONOMY, AND MORALITY: FROM FRANKFURT AND MACINTYRE TO KIERKEGAARD, and Rudd, SELF, VALUE AND NARRATIVE: A KIERKEGAARDIAN APPROACH

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general notion of self-trust seems to me the strongest candidate to date in support of treating our non-epistemic selves—e.g., desires, attitudes, emotions (particularly admiration), etc.—in roughly parallel fashion to our epistemic selves, and this approach culminates in particularly impressive fashion in making sense of the complex character of communities and traditions (chaps. 7–9). Scope and unification are two important virtues of systematic accounts and I think even Zagzebski's most staunch critics will appreciate their exemplification in her self-trust-based theory. She laments at the outset of her monograph that "rarely we do get . . . any attempt to connect epistemic authority with the literature on authority in moral and political philosophy" (1). Her book is an impressive response to that lament, starting from the ground up, from trust to authority. The scope of Zagzebski's account unifies the issues addressed in her book with diverse philosophical literature, and of course with several ongoing debates in epistemology. *Epistemic Authority* will be of interest to a broad readership, including moral philosophers and social and political philosophers. It is also essential reading for any epistemologist interested in trust, testimony, or any topic falling under the label "social epistemology."

*Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality: From Frankfurt and MacIntyre to Kierkegaard*, by John J. Davenport. New York: Routledge, 2012. Pp. xv + 230. £85/\$140 (hardback); £29.99/\$49.95 (paper).

*Self, Value and Narrative: A Kierkegaardian Approach*, by Anthony Rudd. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xiii + 268. £42/\$75 (hardback).

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The turn to narrative in accounts of practical identity has been controversial. The claim that narrative is central to the intelligibility of human lives—found in such thinkers as MacIntyre, Ricoeur and Schechtman—has generated great interest but faced numerous objections. For instance: Does the narrative identity approach confuse stories with their subjects? Does it construe "narrative" too strongly, smuggling literary properties into human lives in misleading ways, or does it construe "narrative" so weakly that its claims become trivial? Alongside this general debate, there has been a parallel discussion in Kierkegaard studies. Several essays in Davenport and Rudd's edited collection *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre* (2001) advanced a view that Kierkegaard is himself committed to a view of "narrative unity" importantly similar to MacIntyre's, and that Kierkegaard's

work sheds light on normative aspects of narrative practical identity typically overlooked in the wider debate. Over the last decade, various sceptical questions have been raised of Kierkegaardian narrativists: some akin to those raised in the wider debate, some more specifically Kierkegaardian in focus. The latter include: Do attempts to explain the aesthetic-ethical distinction in terms of narrative unity overlook the diversity of aestheticism, focusing excessively on *Either/Or's* A alone? Doesn't Kierkegaard demonstrate key senses (such as in ethical and religious choice) in which "self" refers not to something best understood in terms of narrative, but to an entity *fully present now*? Kierkegaard has thus been presented both as a narrativist and as someone deeply sceptical about some of narrativism's claims. These two fine books make distinct but overlapping contributions to the "pro-narrative" side of this debate, both defending forms of narrative realism.

Disclosure time: I am not a neutral observer with respect to either book. Davenport cites some embryonic sceptical remarks I made about the "MacIntyrean Kierkegaardian" project in a paper at the APA in December 2004 as the prompt for the main ideas in his project, and his book is presented to a significant degree as a detailed response to the related critique I worked out in subsequent publications. Rudd acknowledges both Davenport and myself as dialogue partners on this topic for many years, noting the former's "more or less parallel project" to his own and my own "searching criticisms of those projects, which helped me to articulate much more clearly to myself what I wanted to defend" (vi).

There are new arguments here, and the positions Davenport and Rudd had presented in earlier work are considerably enriched. But there are also various clarifications and some concessions to the sceptical critique, such that the gap between narrativists and narratosceptics seems to have narrowed. For instance, both Davenport and Rudd now more explicitly acknowledge the importance of welcoming a plurality of goods into our lives, and that a degree of existential risk is necessary and desirable in the well-lived life. This review will not allow space for any significant advance in this debate beyond those made in the books reviewed.<sup>1</sup> I shall merely offer a summary of each book in turn; briefly suggest a couple of criticisms; and, by way of comparing the two books, say something about how each has an important strength compared to the other.

Going beyond his earlier contributions, Davenport advances a complex, five-level account of "narrative unity." In the scene-setting chapter 1, he develops the distinction (found in Korsgaard and Schechtman) between practical and theoretical identity and the relevance of narrative thereto. Chapter 2 summarises recent objections to narrative theories of the self in both the general and specifically Kierkegaardian literature.

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<sup>1</sup>A forthcoming collection of essays aims to do so: see *Narrative, Identity and the Kierkegaardian Self*, ed. John Lippitt and Patrick Stokes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

Davenport distinguishes different levels of narrative continuity relevant to practical identity, supporting MacIntyre's view that intentional action has a narrative form. However, he argues that action is one of several types of experience that form narrativ connections as agents live their lives "prior to autobiographical reflection and other narration" (8). Here the charge is that opponents (and some narrativists) commit the "logos fallacy" of equating "narrative structure with a rendition or account" (53). This introduces the first of eight theses that summarise Davenport's new position. Against the objection that whereas stories are artifacts, whole human lives aren't, Davenport offers the *analogy thesis*: "the truthmaker of a biographical narrative itself has something much *like* the multidimensional weave of temporally extended meaning-relations that we find in stories" (55). This truthmaker Davenport names a temporal being's *narraviove*, connoting "a story that lives, the development of which is, for the most part, prior to its telling or rational interpretation" (71). The most basic level of *narraviove* arrives pre-consciously, and these *narraviove* connections are necessary for basic planning agency. But chapter 3 goes on to argue that personal autonomy—a feature considered key to Kierkegaard's aesthetic-ethical distinction—involves higher levels of narrative unity beyond this. Against the objection that the distinction between aesthetic and ethical selfhood cannot adequately be explained in terms of greater narrative unity, Davenport seeks to offer no fewer than five different levels of narrative unity.

Unity-0 is a pre-reflective recognition of ourselves as the same subject of consciousness over time. Unity-1 (the unity of "planning agency") "is found in the lives of all agents with responsibilities ranging over extended plans" (45). Davenport now agrees that *Either/Or's* aesthetes, such as A and the Seducer, possess both these levels of unity (47). What they lack, he claims, is unity-2: "*continuity of cares* through willed devotion to ends, persons and ideals" (47–48). It is commitments involving higher-order volitions (in a broadly Frankfurtian sense) which sustain the agent's projects and relationships over time. Neither aesthete recognises the existence of values that have normative authority for their cares (107). Thus they also lack unity-3, which amounts to a revised version of Frankfurtian "whole-heartedness," in which one is fully dedicated to the goals of each of one's cares, has no conflicting higher-order volitions, has no essential conflict between the strong evaluations grounding different cares, and where one makes a "reasonable effort" to balance them and reduce pragmatic conflict between them, while "remaining open" to learning new values and accepting criticism of existing cares. Finally, there is unity-4, a motivating ideal of "perfect harmony" that, in a concession to the "mortality objection" (that narrative intelligibility is threatened by the interruption of life by death), Davenport admits that we will never achieve (at least this side of death, such that here a kind of eschatological faith in post-mortem survival is required). He grants that "the narrative structure of practical identity is incomplete in the final analysis because it points towards an

eschatological *telos* in which we can only have faith" (166). This introduces the importance of Tolkienian *eucatastrophe*, on which Davenport has written interestingly elsewhere, and the related importance of hope.

Here we see something of the narrowing of the narrativist-narratosceptic gap. Davenport acknowledges that "MacIntyrean Kierkegaardians" had previously placed too much focus on A in judging "the aesthetic" (193n32), and now includes fuller discussions of different kinds of Kierkegaardian aesthete. As noted, he also acknowledges the importance of giving full recognition to a wide plurality of values in a human life. Indeed, Davenport now explicitly dismisses monomania, lack of imagination and so on as inadequate ways of getting wholeheartedness "on the cheap" (112). Also built into the account is the explicit need for avoiding self-deceptive stories about oneself: "the caring that is psychologically necessary for formal autonomy involves a rational commitment to avoid self-deceptive stories about one's practical identity" (117). *How* we avoid *akrasia*, self-indulgent illusions and the like still remains somewhat obscure to me (more of this later), and Davenport admits that "maybe no one avoids them completely" (118).

But Davenport argues that his new model allows a response to several objections. For instance, the response to the *fact-value objection*—if narrative unity is a *constitutive* condition of having a life at all, how can it have *normative* implications?—is that there are basic levels of unity that are constitutive, and higher levels that are normative. *Narrative* plays a crucial role in the *mimetic thesis*, according to which "the basic human capacity to make secondary narratives . . . is *derived from* our experience in living out primary narratives" (57). However, Davenport acknowledges, via the *incompleteness thesis*, that even the best literary or biographical depictions of a life "necessarily fall short of the almost infinite detail of significance in actual lived experience, which is always charged with potential resonances between experiences in past, present, and the anticipated future" (58). However, this doesn't imply that the more detail, the better the biography, because "the purpose of most types of secondary narrative is not to chronicle as many different points as possible in the weave of significance that gave the real person's life its unity-0 and unity-1. This point is obscured by the *selectivity objection* because it fails to distinguish primary and secondary narratives" (59).

Is this charge of where the obscurity lies fair? The "selectivity objection" was always about what Davenport now calls secondary narratives, and only on something like the *narrative* assumption does this notion of a "primary narrative" gain any purchase. I think Davenport would acknowledge that he was not clear about this distinction in earlier work. One of the strengths of this book is its willingness to tell narrativists what they need to be clearer about (the unclarity of precisely what narrativism commits us to being a major complaint of the earlier narratosceptic critique). In the controversial idea of a *narrative*, Davenport shows himself willing to bite an important bullet, in answering the question of how "that which

gets articulated can have something like a narrative structure before it is articulated" (64). As he acknowledges, many prominent narrativists are *not* committed to the kind of strong narrative realism to which he (and Rudd) subscribe. And it is here, I think, that we might reasonably ask for more detail: it still remains somewhat mysterious in precisely what sense a *narrative* is "like" an articulated narrative, and in what sense it is not.

How do secondary self-narratives enter into our *narrative*? Here Davenport offers the *articulation thesis*, attributed to Schechtman, in which from early in life, the *narrative* of one's practical identity combines "more or less tacit self-understandings" with "interpretations explicitly worked out in thorough meditation on oneself" (95), the latter tending to be more important at higher levels of narrative unity. To this he adds the *existential coherence thesis*, according to which autonomy requires both "that we freely form and maintain cares and commitments to long-term ends, and . . . can consciously reflect and will as needed to make our cares into an essentially coherent narrative whole in which integrity and wholeheartedness are possible" (97). Since as stated this is open to the worry that a focus on unity might blind us to potential new possibilities (the "missing the adventure" objection), as well as Strawson's objections about "episodics," Davenport notes that this thesis "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" (98). Something similar is true of the *ethical thesis*: "personal autonomy and the kind of narrative unity it involves cannot be developed without taking seriously (as personally relevant to one's life) ethical ideals and moral obligations with objective status" (98). Like Rudd, Davenport insists he is not claiming that the content of "the ethical" be derived from unity-2. From Rudd he derives the *regulative thesis* about unity-3, which stresses the need for harmony between first-order cares, such that how I achieve any given goal needs to be weighed against other goals: it would be a pragmatic contradiction not to care about such regulation (115).

Chapter 4 argues that in his signed writings Kierkegaard offers a narrative conception of mature practical identity. But here the primary reliance is upon *Purity of Heart*. Davenport claims that the ideal of that name, taken to be Kierkegaard's ideal of ethical agency and treated as a kind of wholeheartedness, is an especially strong form of narrative unity, key to the structure of which is infinite resignation. He glosses Kierkegaard's *purity of heart thesis* ("the person who wills one thing that is not the good is actually not willing one thing" (135)) thus: "every volitional stance or set of cares not governed by second-order perfectionist ethical ends willed to the point of infinite resignation cannot become synchronically wholehearted and remain so over time even in the face of death" (135). Hence the final thesis about unity-3: willing to do and suffer "everything for the good" means "to will, in the decision, to be and to remain with the good" (145). This is not a single moment of decision, but *repetition*. "Infinite resignation is a kind of infinite 'patience,' and volitional unity requires such patience"

(145). This links wholeheartedness of will with religious faith, because for Kierkegaard “the only way to secure infinite resignation for the long-run is to trust in the ‘eternal victory’ of the good ‘with the eyes of faith’” (146).

If this has brought us into the territory of the religious, chapter 5 enters it fully with a discussion of mortality, eschatology and faith. Davenport’s response to the “mortality objection” rests in part on the claim that our life-story can become a whole “by anticipating the point at which we will no longer be able to change the meaning of our life” (10), one of his key examples here being Abraham Lincoln (159). I cannot do justice to this discussion here (or to Davenport’s response to the “4D objection” raised by Patrick Stokes), but one worry I am left with is that only a proportion of human lives can be dealt with in such a way. What certainly emerges clearly, however, is the importance to Kierkegaard of the eschatological significance of the self.

Anthony Rudd’s book also tackles large philosophical questions about value and the self. It develops a view of the self that he calls NEST: that it is—in senses the book seeks to work out—Narrative, Evaluative, Self-constituting and Teleological (2). Rudd’s version of NEST is, he claims, “specifically Kierkegaardian” (3), reporting that although he had originally intended to write about the general debate without much reference to Kierkegaard, he ultimately found the Dane “inescapable” (3), Kierkegaard more than any other writer showing him the necessity of the connections between each element of the NEST thesis.

The book divides into three parts, each with three chapters. In chapter 1, drawing on Schechtman but adapting her terminology, Rudd presents the importance of a creative tension between two intuitively plausible but incomplete ideas: “self-acceptance” (the self is in some sense given by our limitations and certain biological and historical facts) and “self-shaping” (the self is something we have to work at forming or constituting). Chapter 2, drawing on MacIntyre, argues that a view capable of doing justice to both ideas was the teleological view of classical virtue ethics, but—*pace* MacIntyre—that its most promising hopes for revival draw less on Aristotle than Plato. Intriguingly but controversially (as Rudd recognises [40, 49–50]), Kierkegaard emerges as the richest modern proponent of a broadly Platonist view of the self, in which “the elements that constitute the self can only be held together in a properly creative tension if the self as a whole is oriented to an objective (Platonic) Good” (6). In unpacking the account of the self in *The Sickness Unto Death*, Rudd reads Kierkegaard as presenting the self as a self-conscious, active synthesising of our immanence or limitations (time, finitude, necessity) and our powers of transcendence (eternity, infinitude, freedom) (41–42). The self *is* the tension between self-shaping and self-acceptance—the struggle presented as “the central theme of [Kierkegaard’s] philosophical career” (39)—in that the self is “something that exists in and through the shaping of itself and in constantly negotiating the limits of what it can and cannot alter” (43). Chapter 3 defends well the existence of a relatively stable character

(including virtue) against sceptics such as John Doris: this matters for Rudd's thesis insofar as "self-shaping" is to be understood as shaping one's character.

Chapters 4 to 6 seek to defend this "Kierkegaardian" view of the self and its orientation to the Good in the context of contemporary debates. Thus chapter 4 engages Frankfurt and his critics, to advance the view that to be a person is to possess the capacity for effective self-evaluation: a capacity that depends (contra Frankfurt) on objectively real values which provide the measure to which such self-scrutiny appeals. Selfhood involves both character and personhood ("a capacity to distance oneself from and thus to work at changing that character" [6]). In chapter 5, Rudd defends this ethical realism against alternatives (Frankfurt's evaluative anti-realism; Korsgaard's constructivism; Foot's neo-Aristotelian naturalism). Chapter 6 offers an account of how self-shaping and self-acceptance can be reconciled if one is oriented *both* to what has objective value and that for which one has an "affinity" (our being drawn to this person rather than that, in personal love; devoting our talents to goods to which we can fully commit rather than goods to which we feel only a sense of obligation). Contrary to prophets of authenticity per se, Kierkegaard recognises our teleological needs, and takes us to have a natural attunement towards the Good (albeit one that we sometimes deny and repress).

Chapters 7 to 9 address narrative. In an introduction to part three, Rudd suggests that partial self-shaping requires the self to become (in part) the author of its own story, and he reprises his view that the ethicist Judge William is committed to "something like MacIntyre's notion of narrative unity" (168). To narratosceptics, the "something like" is precisely what had been obscure in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, and Rudd now makes some important clarifications. First, he acknowledges that narrative unity cannot be "a neutral, non-ethical good," but is itself an "inextricably ethical notion" (170). The solution to my earlier objection—that narrative intelligibility cannot be necessary for selfhood as such *and* the distinguishing mark of the ethical as opposed to the aesthetic—is said to rest in *degrees* of selfhood, and in the picture Rudd goes on to sketch of the aesthete as a partial, divided self; self-deceived and repressed. This hints at one of the most interesting aspects of Rudd's book, namely Kierkegaard's "theory of repression" (discussed in chapter 9).

Against this background, chapter 7 seeks to respond to general sceptics about narrative, and argues that a self-conscious temporal agent can be understood only in narrative terms (175–176). Here a second clarification is important. Rudd's understanding of narrative is stipulative: following MacIntyre rather than, say, Dennett or Velleman, Rudd presents narrative as intelligibility-oriented, and he dismisses views whereby selves are (perhaps necessary) fictions. This is helpful, insofar as it explicitly clarifies much of what was only latent in some of the earlier discussion. Rudd suggests the fact that such different positions talk of "narrativity" should not lead us to see them as having anything substantive in common



(177). However, what is sauce for the goose here is sauce for the gander: Rudd might do more to distinguish such distinct positions as radical anti-narrativists (such as Strawson) and more modest narratosceptics (like Peter Lamarque and myself) whom he tends to lump together under descriptors such as “opponents of narrative theory.” (For instance, I entirely agree with Rudd, in his chapter 8 account of Strawson’s episodic ethics, that the latter gives an inadequate account of friendship and undervalues the importance of guilt.) Part of the point made by the latter camp was the unclarity of the term “narrative” as used in the earlier debate, and, in Lamarque’s words, that we should not “expect too much” of it. Rudd’s acknowledgement that the positions of “narrativists” can be radically different (even incompatible) lends some support to the objection that the terminology may be less than optimal—though, as I noted at the outset, clarity on what both Rudd and Davenport are committed to in using this terminology has been vastly enhanced by these two volumes. What is also helpfully made clearer here is Rudd’s commitment to the MacIntyrean idea that selfhood and narrative are *mutually presupposing* (176, 185), which does distinguish this position from some others available in the literature.

Chapter 8 tries to show why ethical self-evaluation must take a narrative form, also addressing ethical objections to narrative (such as the “missing the adventure” objection) which Rudd denies are a problem for his narrativism. Here he defends—as a normative not merely descriptive claim—what Schechtman calls “strong narrativism.” I return to this shortly. Finally, chapter 9 tackles another key objection, the self’s tendency towards self-deception, connecting Kierkegaard with psychoanalysis. In a very interesting discussion, Rudd addresses the important fact that much of the self is unknown to itself. Acknowledging the importance of self-deception and fantasy as threats to self-understanding, he claims that self-shaping requires “imagination and proper emotional responsiveness” (229) to these threats. In a departure from Davenport’s approach, Rudd explores the value of psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic tool in the pursuit of self-knowledge. Insisting on the necessity of narrative, Rudd argues that good psychotherapy enables us to replace inferior narratives about ourselves with better, more truthful, ones. Though Rudd draws explicitly on Freud, and to a greater extent Jung, much of what he says about psychoanalysis is also true of at least some non-psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and this is a topic that warrants further discussion.<sup>2</sup> The use made of Jung suggests one kind of difference between Rudd and Davenport. Criticising those aspects of Freud that encourage us to identify to an excessive extent with the conscious ego, Rudd draws on Jung to suggest that the I needs to learn *from*—and not just *about*—the unconscious; to let itself be shaped *by* the unconscious (239). Rudd sees important parallels between Jung and

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<sup>2</sup>Though as I have argued elsewhere, there might be Kierkegaardian reasons for concern about the practice of certain forms of psychotherapy that valorise the client’s own judgments as unchallengeable.

Kierkegaard, though what makes Kierkegaard's view of repression distinctive is that we repress *our need for the Good* (239). In this sense, Kierkegaard goes beyond Jung's primary concern with psychic harmony (say, between a person's introvert and extrovert aspects) to a concern also with relations with others and with the good (244). Nevertheless, Rudd sees Jungian integration as an important complement to the ethical understanding of the self his book seeks to develop, such that this integration is an ethical or evaluative goal (245). And psychotherapy can have a normative dimension, such that the process of understanding oneself and the Good can go hand in hand (245–246).

Rudd describes his approach as Kierkegaardian, but "brackets off" any distinctively theistic (let alone Christian) dimension of Kierkegaard's thought. (So in his account of the Kierkegaardian self in chapter 2, the idea that the self "rests transparently in the power that established it" is somewhat underplayed.) I think this is a deliberate strategic decision: one cannot cover everything, and the breadth of material Rudd *has* covered is impressive. But as regards the "Kierkegaardian" claim, I think this strategy comes at a greater price than he acknowledges.<sup>3</sup> In seeking to root their positions in Kierkegaard's signed writings, both Rudd and Davenport lean heavily on themes from *Purity of Heart*. But what about other discourses? Rudd's "strong narrativism" involves "actively and consciously" undertaking to understand one's life "as a story, with a unified theme and little or no extraneous material" (Schechtman, cited 205). It interests me that this sounds very much like what Kierkegaard cautions us *against* in his reflections on what we are to learn from the lilies of the field and the birds of the air in his discourses on Matthew 6. Such self-focus introduces *worry*, the opposite of that contentment with being a human being that the lilies and birds teach. I do not see how we could take Rudd's advice without introducing *comparison*, which Kierkegaard presents there as precisely the threat to contentment. (This comparison does not have to be with others, but could be with a better version of ourselves: I find the story of how the "naughty little bird . . . the restless mentality of comparison"<sup>4</sup> worries the lily into destruction amongst the saddest—yet most psychologically astute—passages in Kierkegaard's *oeuvre*. A key message of the parable is that our common humanity matters more than our diversity.) Interestingly, this seems to be Kierkegaard's version of the Strawson-valourised "happy-go-lucky . . . letting be" that Rudd critiques (218). Rudd does acknowledge that there is something of this kind of thought in Kierkegaard (219), but it would be interesting to know what he makes specifically of the important lilies and birds discourses: this biblical passage so fascinated Kierkegaard

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<sup>3</sup>I leave to one side the more specific question of whether the Kierkegaardian self can adequately be treated without taking into account Kierkegaard's Lutheran Protestant heritage. For more on this, see Matias Møl Dalsgaard, "Non-Narrative Protestant goods: Protestant ethics and Kierkegaardian selfhood," in Lippitt and Stokes.

<sup>4</sup>*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 169.

that he returned to it on numerous occasions. They present, I think, a picture significantly different from the pro-narrative conclusions Rudd draws from his discussion of related themes in Strawson and Velleman. What is commended—to take joy in “today” and to view as irrelevant “tomorrow”<sup>5</sup>—seems to leave little room for a focus on narrative unity. The joy that the lilies and birds teach is said to put “the whole emphasis on: *the present time*.”<sup>6</sup> In a related discourse, Kierkegaard describes “the next day” as “the grappling hook with which the huge mass of worries seizes hold of the single individual’s little ship”;<sup>7</sup> thus “if a person is to gain mastery over his mind, he must begin by getting rid of the next day.”<sup>8</sup> The *silence* that the lily and bird also teach human beings is explicitly linked to *forgetting oneself and one’s plans*.<sup>9</sup>

Whether the Kierkegaard of these discourses could generate a plausible account of practical identity, I don’t know. And in drawing attention to this, I am not recommending a life of total *que sera sera* passivity, merely suggesting that the dial might, for Kierkegaard, often be closer to self-acceptance and further from self-shaping than Rudd’s strong narrativism.<sup>10</sup> (I also think that what self-acceptance *means* looks very different in the light of Kierkegaard’s Protestant commitment to the idea that each individual’s specific life and task is God-given and thus infinitely valuable: this introduces an important dimension lacking from a focus on self-acceptance as givenness of time and kind or even of stable character-possession.) Perhaps this relates to Eleanor Helms’s suggestion that the self is better understood as a *reader* than a narrator or co-author (179, 206). Just as the task of a reader is to hope, perhaps the self is best understood as one who always *hopes* to find “narrative unity” in the world—*yet recognises her own powerlessness to bring this about*.<sup>11</sup> And ultimately, this cannot be divorced from Kierkegaard’s faith in God. There do seem to be crucial differences between Platonic commitment to the Good and the radicality of dependence upon God that is central to so many of Kierkegaard’s discourses. In this sense, perhaps Rudd’s strong narrativism is more “ethical” than fully “religious.” Davenport’s recognition of the importance of infinite resignation is a pertinent advance here (though the lilies and birds discourses also raise questions about whether

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<sup>5</sup>*Without Authority*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 38.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>7</sup>*Christian Discourses*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 72, translation amended.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>9</sup>*Without Authority*, 19.

<sup>10</sup>Dalgaard draws attention to this aspect of the lilies and the birds in the essay cited above, and implicitly—yet in more detail—in his delightful epistolary novel *Don’t Despair: Letter to a Modern Man*, trans. Patrick Stokes (London: Pine Tribe, 2014).

<sup>11</sup>Eleanor Helms, “The End in the Beginning: Eschatology in Kierkegaard’s Literary Criticism,” in Lippitt and Stokes. Compare here “the one who prays aright,” who goes from being a speaker to being a listener (*Without Authority*, 11–12).

autonomy is really as central to Kierkegaard as it is to Davenport, and I wonder whether they don't also pose problems for part of his solution to the mortality objection). In this sense, there is a price to be paid for Rudd's "bracketing off" any distinctively Christian or even theistic dimension of Kierkegaard's thought. He denies that he is committed to an overplanned life (217–220). But perhaps the lilies and birds discourses might begin to show why "strong narrativism" will still strike some of us as precisely that. For this Kierkegaard, it is not just monomaniacal career obsessives and the like who have strayed too far from self-acceptance in the direction of self-shaping: it is the human norm—and this is our problem.

If Davenport's closer attention to Kierkegaard's "religious" sphere might serve as an advance on Rudd's position, let me close with a way in which I think this corrective works the other way around. I refer to Rudd's focus on the importance of unconscious repression. In several of Davenport's formal stipulations (such as those regarding entertaining risks but not taking them lightly, and being willing to tolerate "for a time" conflicts amongst cares), I wonder if this is adequate to addressing practical issues at the level of the phenomenology of an actual lived life. Specifically, Davenport sometimes seems to present agents as having an implausibly reliable view of the elements they need to evaluate (downplaying the threat of self-deception). For instance, his reply to the "selectivity objection" acknowledges that one can thematise only a finite subset of "meaning-relations" in one's *narrative*, but claims that this need not amount to self-deception provided one focuses as honestly as possible on the most relevant subset thereof. This may be an ideal, but to someone impressed by Rudd's chapter 9, as I am, it is likely to sound a bit psychologically naïve. Rudd acknowledges the sheer *difficulty* of self-knowledge because of self-deception and unconscious repression. But Davenport, replying to the self-deception objection, stresses the importance of a "rational commitment to avoid self-deceptive stories about one's practical identity" (117), since without this one is pragmatically inconsistent—and such a self-conception "is liable to collapse rapidly under any significant pressure from external reality" (118). Despite his concession that "maybe no one avoids . . . completely" (118) such self-deception, he seems to underestimate the extent to which one might live a *radically* self-deceived life without ever becoming sufficiently aware of this. For every Scrooge or Ivan Illyich, how many die without experiencing their redemptive self-revelations? Less dramatically, I have suggested elsewhere that the purpose of much successful psychotherapy is to lead a person from feeling *unmanageably* to *manageably* torn. If so, then "ambivalence" describes this more faithfully than "wholeheartedness." Relatedly, I have argued that there are important dimensions of moral psychology (such as kinds of forgiveness) that Davenport's wholeheartedness account cannot readily accommodate.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>For both of these points, see my "Forgiveness and the Rat Man: Kierkegaard, 'narrative unity' and 'wholeheartedness' revisited," in Lippitt and Stokes, where I also sketch more differences between Davenport and Rudd's accounts than space here allows.

These critical suggestions notwithstanding, both these rich, carefully argued books make significant advances in developing positions their authors had previously sketched, but in ways that—to sceptics—raised as many questions as answers. The gap between Kierkegaardian narrativists and narratosceptics may now be narrower than hitherto. But the process of exploring the disagreement in detail has brought to the surface valuable discussions the content of which I suspect was previously unimagined by contributors on either side of the debate.

*Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life*, by Derk Pereboom. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 219 pages. \$45 (hardcover).

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*Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life* presents a “reworked and expanded version” of the view that Derk Pereboom first developed thirteen years ago in *Living Without Free Will*<sup>1</sup> (4). Pereboom’s position may be categorized as free will skepticism, the view that it is unlikely that we have the sort of free will required for “basic desert” moral responsibility. While the book contains one new chapter on the possibility of rational deliberation, most chapters present updated versions of arguments for claims he has previously defended. Pereboom evidently takes seriously objections that have been raised against his reasoning, spending a good portion of the book responding to them, and the newer material is exploratory in tone, giving the impression that he is open to further objections and modifications of his position. (At one point he even suggests that “the resolute incompatibilist” is as unreasonable as the “resolute compatibilist” and “confirmed agnostic” on the issue of the compatibility of free will and determinism, since none is prepared to change her mind in light of further considerations (94).) The book as a whole provides the philosopher of free will with much food for thought, and is admirable in its insistence that our practices of holding each other responsible are not immune to theoretical challenges, but must be considered (and reconsidered) in light of what we know and don’t know about the nature and extent of human freedom. Below I raise a few critical questions about the structure and cogency of Pereboom’s arguments for free will skepticism, as presented in the first few chapters of his book, before going on to discuss the significance of his “articulation of [the] practical components” of his position, in the later chapters.

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<sup>1</sup>New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.