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Edited by

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Life-Narrative and Death as the End of Freedom: Kierkegaard on Anticipatory Resoluteness

John J. Davenport

Introduction: New Problems for Narrative Theories

In three recent articles, John Lippitt has raised 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 and ethical maturity) involves achieving "narrative unity" in the stories that we are.[1] His questions intersect with other critiques of narrative models raised in the wider and growing literature on this topic in the past decade. Lippitt forces us to reconsider claims that Anthony Rudd, I, and others made in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre* that MacIntyre's famous account of narrative unity as part of the telos of human life[2] sheds light on Kierkegaard's conception of selfhood, and that insights from Kierkegaard can help us develop and defend such a narrative model. In particular, Lippitt questions whether narrative is a useful model for real human lives, and whether movement from the "aesthetic" to the "ethical" outlook or stage of life is illuminated by the idea of narrative unity.

Moreover, as Kathy Behrendt, Lippitt, and other contributors to the wider philosophical literature have recently argued,[3] the phenomenon of death poses special problems for narrative models. Patrick Stokes has shown that Kierkegaard recognizes such problems when he describes death as indefinable, inexplicable, and apparently contingent in relation to prior events.[4] Stokes agrees with George Pitcher that the meaning of our life-narrative can be altered profoundly by our death or by events following it;[5] but then, given Kierkegaard's point about the radical uncertainty of the time and manner of our death, "it cannot be brought into any narrative that might confer meaning on it while the subject lives."[6] Thus, although Kierkegaard shares MacIntyre's concern for the "unified coherence of the

responsible self in time," the life in which this coherence is found can only be understood as a narrative "in a necessarily incomplete sense."[7] While it applies to all human lives, this point also extends Lippitt's worries to the religious stage, given the significance of mortality for religious life-views. We have to ask: Even *if* the choices that form an "ethical" self in Kierkegaard's sense involve an explicable kind of narrative continuity, can such a clarified narrative model also help us understand Kierkegaard's account of the transition to religious faith? Or are narrative metaphors for human life useful only through the ethical stage, not the religious?

This chapter will focus on Kierkegaard's proposal in his discourse "At a Graveside," which indicates how our narrative identity can include our mortality. But for the power of this solution to be clear, I must first briefly outline a new way of conceiving narrative identity that builds on Anthony Rudd's efforts to answer the main objections of Lippitt and other critics of narrative theory.[8]

Narrative Realism and Kierkegaardian Autonomy: An Outline of the New Account

The concept of "narravive." My new approach involves distinguishing different types of narrative unity that are discussed in the literature and arguing that the basic coherence of meaning-relations within a living person's story is ontologically prior to the sort of "telling" and reflection involved in making narrative artifacts. To clarify this distinction, I now refer to the structure of a person's practical identity as a "narravive" or lived story, as opposed to narratives about her identity or life that may either truthfully report or distort her narravive. This new account, which I call narrative realism, can be summarized in five basic theses:

(A) *The analogy thesis:* The truthmaker of a biographical story itself has something *like* a narrative structure, something similar to the multidimensional weave of temporally extended meaning-relations that we find in stories made by human recountings—even though much of it is not a result of any interpersonal or intrapersonal logos, accounting, or reflective act (see thesis E); the term "narravive" marks this difference from narratives as artifacts, told stories, or products of reflective explanation.

(B) *The level thesis:* This real structure of diachronic meaning-relations that is a unique practical identity includes as *constitutive conditions* at least minimal short-term and long-term memory capacities and unity of apperception (unity-o) and the teleological relations of significance necessary

for planning agency, i.e., intentions that extend over long periods of time and coordinate multiple capacities (unity-1). These conditions make possible, but do not entail, higher levels of connection that are associated with personal autonomy.

(C) *MacIntyre's mimetic thesis:* 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 narravives—both those that constitute individual practical identities and those that constitute the shared identities of interpersonal groups.

(D) *The incompleteness thesis:* Even the best literary depictions of a fictional life, or biographical portrayals of an actual life, or historical works about individuals or groups, necessarily fall short of the infinite detail of significance in actual lived experience, which involves networks of resonances between possible and actual acts and experiences in past, present, and anticipated future including teleological connections and myriad other kinds of association-relations.

(E) *The articulation thesis:* The narravive of one's practical identity includes, from an early age, conceptions of one's activities, character, personality, roles and relationships, etc., which often follow familiar scripts or social paradigms. These range from more or less tacit self-understandings to interpretations explicitly worked out in thorough meditation on oneself. Thus reflexive *logoi* of several kinds add to and reshape the weave of meanings already acquired and continually enlarged through prereflective experience. At least some reflection on self of these sorts is necessary for planning agency in general, and more is needed to achieve thematic coherence of one's goals and activities in one's narravive as a whole.

These theses outline a way of understanding practical identities in narrative terms that makes it possible to apply different kinds of "narrative unity" to aspects of identity. I attribute this sort of narrative realist view, which opposes constructivist and fictionalist versions of narrative identity, to David Carr, Paul Ricoeur, and Charles Taylor, and I regard it as a faithful extension of MacIntyre's sketch of a narrative conception in *After Virtue.*

Narrative and autonomy: four levels. This basic model can be expanded to link with an account of personal autonomy built on Harry Frankfurt's notions of "caring" and "wholeheartedness." Rudd has argued that to meet Lippitt's challenges, we must distinguish between the kind of narrative connection that we find in any "self-conscious rational being who has some narrative sense of his or her past" and a stronger kind of integration

that involves "autonomy" and acceptance of responsibility for one's concrete personality and dispositions.[9] Narrative realist thesis B is meant to formalize this point: In particular, I now distinguish four different levels of narrative unity, each of which is necessary but not sufficient for the ones after it:

0. *Unity of apperception:* We immediately (or prereflectively) recognize ourselves as the *same subject* of consciousness that experienced earlier actions and events we remember in the recent and more distant past, and that we expect to experience new events in the future (which can be interrupted by amnesia, extreme dissociate disorder, extended automatism, or "episodic" consciousness).

1. *Unity of planning agency:* We experience most of our actions as nested in intentional chains moving out from shorter- to longer-term plans and thus as under a conscious control steered by teleological connections between past commitments and expectations about future options (a necessary condition for ordinary moral responsibility that can be interrupted by long-term recall impairment, traumatic stress disorders, psychoses that alter understanding of our history, etc.).

2. *Continuity of cares* through willed devotion to ends, persons, or ideals. Threshold levels of unity-0 and unity-1 enable planning agents to make the volitional and cognitive efforts needed to achieve further integration of ends and activities associated with *personal autonomy*; commitments involving higher-order volitions actively sustain the agent's projects and relationships over time.

3. *Wholeheartedness:* (a) The agent is fully dedicated to the goals of each of her cares and (b) has no conflicting higher-order volitions; (c) the strong evaluations that ground her different cares are not in any essential conflict, and (d) she makes a reasonable effort to balance their pursuit and reduce pragmatic conflict between them within a single life, while (e) remaining open to learning new values and accepting criticism of her existing cares.

This conception of wholeheartedness is a significant refinement of Frankfurt's weaker notion,[10] since it holds that caring depends on what agents take to be objective values, and hence that unity of purpose requires coherence among these values. It also distinguishes positive and negative conditions of wholeheartedness and holds that caring implicitly commits the agent to caring about the adequacy of her grounds for caring (which avoids the problem of fanaticism).

Even short of wholeheartedness, caring involves a type of volitional unity going well beyond both unity of apperception (unity-0) and the extended temporal awareness required for any robust kind of long-term intentional action (unity-1), which agents may enjoy when simply acting on their strongest desires. As Lippitt recognizes, this kind of psychic unity is common to several of Kierkegaard's aesthetes and to agents who enter "the ethical" stage by forming higher-order volitions concerning their own character, or moving away from wantonness toward personal autonomy. Still, agents with "ethical" life-views in Kierkegaard's sense take responsibility for their own character through caring in ways that most aesthetic agents do not, i.e., through commitments to goods taken to be worth caring about—commitments that are maintained by cultivating the requisite motives and attitudes—which constitute an enduring volitional identity. Thus autonomy conceived in terms of self-perpetuating cares implies another level of narrative unity (unity-2): the person who forms lasting cares (the strongest variety of which are "ground projects" for which she would die)[11] brings under common themes the meaning that many aspects of her life have for her. Thus she has a type of narrative unity that is lacking in wantons and in the simpler sorts of aesthetes, such as 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 caring about it in the volitional sense.

The level of narrative connection involved in long-term devotion to personal projects and relationships 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 concrete circumstances or the situation of human life in general. A person's cares may also conflict *essentially* if they are based on inconsistent strong evaluations (in Charles Taylor's sense)[12] 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. A person in this state is more autonomous than a wanton in acting on either of her cares, but she is not *fully* autonomous because of what Frankfurt calls the "ambiguity" in her will.

Likewise, in his accounts of "spirit" and "sin," Kierkegaard recognizes that someone can make real commitments or will in the way that tends to illuminate the relevance of ethical ideals for character yet remain volitionally divided. I have argued that we find such "halfheartedness" in "heroic aesthetes" who are outwardly devoted to some great work or excellence

in a practice; in agents who only partially repent of some error; in agents who will to remain alienated from some of their operative motives or to continue with essentially inconsistent cares; and in those who "demonically" oppose the good.[13] 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" (CA, 129–30/SKS 4, 431). Yet their continuity is still subject to sudden reversals, because they lack the coherence among their cares necessary for wholeheartedness.

Wholehearted caring is thus another distinct level of self-integration (unity-3). For Frankfurt, it consists in agreement among the higher-order volitions involved in our cares; for Kierkegaard, who (*pace* Frankfurt) sees caring as depending on strong evaluation, this also requires valuations of activities, goals, persons, relationships, and ideals worth caring about. 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. Yet wholeheartedness does not require that all our cares serve a grand single purpose; it can be realized in harmony between the main themes of our life established by our existentially central cares. This point is aptly made in Rudd's responses to Lippitt: "[Unity] is characteristically achieved in and through all the particular projects I pursue, not as one more particular project on the same level as them."[14] 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.

Three Kierkegaardian theses. With all these distinctions in place, Kierkegaard's contribution can be summarized in three theses that extend narrative realism beyond the basic theses (A)–(E). The first concerns some of the executive conditions of autonomy (as contrasted with what we may call cognitive source conditions involving adequate education and ability to reflect on the origins of one's values, which are also important):

> (F) *The existential coherence thesis*: Autonomy, understood as the ability to govern one's core priorities and overall direction of one's life (the control-condition of responsibility for one's identity), requires both that we freely form identity-constituting cares and commitments and that we have the

capacity to make them into a *coherent narrative whole* in which integrity and wholeheartedness are possible.

Of course, as it stands, this claim faces Lippitt's objection that a focus on unity may prevent us from appreciating the importance of novelty and a sufficient diversity of ends that can be valued in a rich life.[15] It also faces more radical objections that agent-autonomy can be episodic, requiring no long-term commitments or cares in Frankfurt's sense. 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 integration may only be part of the explanation, though it cannot be a trivial addition if the narrativist approach is on the right track. The same applies to the most distinctively Kierkegaardian thesis in this debate:

(G) *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—some sense of "the good" and "duty" that governs other values and personal affinities reflected in one's cares, and that is not simply a function of what satisfies the agent's contingent desires and preferences.

This thesis can be strengthened by requiring that the requisite conception of ethical norms be a perfectionist one,[16] or even an agapic one. Thus the strength of (G), and of the robust narrative unity-2 involved in bringing our other cares and life-projects under ethical ideals, varies according to more specific conceptions of "the ethical" (and G as a meta-ethical thesis is neutral between these).

Of course, these theses are controversial and face several objections. For example, against (G): (i) Non-moral cares, commitments, or projects are said to be sufficient for an autonomous life;[17] (ii) "the aesthete's life has all the 'meaning' that he needs," as Lippitt puts it[18]—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. Kierkegaardian responses will focus on illuminating the ways in which nonmoral cares are subject to types of practical conflict that can only be resolved by devotion to ethical ideals that trump or outweigh the values grounding nonmoral cares.[19] However, Lippitt doubts that ethical agency requires considering the unity of one's life as a whole. He notes

(correctly) that it is unusual for us to consider directly the meaningfulness of our "whole life":

> 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 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.[20]

Here the value of our level-distinctions becomes apparent. Lippitt is right that intelligibility of *a familiar, basic kind* is not the issue in this poignant case; unity-1 need not be lost in such a series of unfortunate events. The problem is unity-3. Lippitt's protagonist needs a richer sort of intelligibility than would suffice for planning agency alone. Suppose he can articulate (to some extent) why he loves his wife and daughter and why he had to oppose some of their decisions for their own good. He then has to ask whether his reasons fit together as practical considerations, what is the best way to remain loyal to what was right in these cares, and how to respond to whatever new values have been disclosed—in other words, how to go on in a way that intelligibly extends the cares that have defined him. In support of (G) note that Lippitt's protagonist clearly sees his predicament in *ethical terms.*

By contrast, aesthetes or care-evasive sophisticates would not even muster unity-2. They would drop their old ties without regret, or make light of the situation, or regard the significant others in the story as fungible and seek quick replacements, or even perversely romanticize the rejections. We see such cavalier reactions as suspect because they lack ethical depth; if the protagonist had any ongoing commitment to these relationships, he would be profoundly affected by the losses. This example illustrates the third Kierkegaardian addition to basic narrative realism:

(H) *The regulative thesis* about unity-3: 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.

This position is defended by Rudd[21] and also explored in Kierkegaard's famous discussion of "Purity of Heart," which adds the even more demanding claim that wholeheartedness ultimately requires infinite resignation in devotion to a perfectionist standard, which demands that everything be done for the sake of the good (UDVS, 78/SKS 8, 184).

The aesthetic and ethical stages restated. For Kierkegaard, then, the synchronic unity among our cares involved in wholeheartedness requires an ethical frame to guide their diachronic development; 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$_2$ about such an encompassing evaluative view that makes wholehearted caring$_1$ possible is tantamount to caring$_2$ about "the ethical"; evaluative coherence cannot be reached without norms that trump other values, or that *obligate* in the moral sense.[22] Then the recognition of ethical norms will be tied logically and dynamically to caring wholeheartedly about other (nonmoral) 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/SKS 3, 164) 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.[23]

But how do these distinctions map onto Kierkegaard's many remarks (pseudonymous and signed) about the "aesthetic" and the "ethical"? Lippitt has argued 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/SKS 3, 177).[24] 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 aesthetic values (difference, oddity, comic aspects, thrill, etc.) in everything.[25]

Here again, space only allows a brief summary of my response. I agree with Lippitt that Kierkegaard does not mean to explain the superiority of the ethical simply in terms of "narrative unity or coherence." Rather, we have a spectrum of aesthetic types who can be partly specified in terms of the different levels of continuity. An *unawakened aesthete* is a wanton

acting on strongest immediate desires with no sense of the need for autonomy or responsibility for self; at the extreme, this is a kind of dreaming without spiritual self-awareness, living entirely in the immediate flow of prereflective experience prior to any anxiety about freedom. At the point of awakening, though, we find *simple egoists* who pursue immediate pleasures, entertainment, and gain while tacitly avoiding anything that stirs awareness of the need to care about final ends based on more enduring values. This includes aesthetes who, as planning agents, pursue success via talent without caring about any "practice" that values excellence in the use of this talent for social goods. These kinds of aesthetes lack unity-2.

But most of Kierkegaard's aesthetes are not mere Frankfurtian "wantons"; the young man *A* is awakened to the existential need for a deeper identity but subsists in a shadowy, negative higher-order volition not to form any concrete cares concerning any role, end, or task in the finite world.[26] *A*'s project is not an earnest artistic endeavor; it is a "holding pattern" to avoid landing anywhere in life, to avoid the primordial choice to give ethical ideals purchase on his identity. Johannes the Seducer is even more advanced in self-deception than *A*. His abstract project of cultivating "the interesting in all things"[27]—which means focusing on their oddity, originality, difference from the norm, comic aspects, dramatic tension etc., rather than caring about any potential contribution to individual or social well-being—focuses him away from the values that are the natural objects of emotions, making his emotions into mere means for his self-fancy and sentimental indulgence.[28] Both *A* and the Seducer exhibit a semblance of unity-2, but they are not really devoted to any values outside themselves as worthy of care.

There are also what I call *heroic* aesthetes who do care about ends for the sake of some kind of greatness, e.g., an agent who dedicates herself earnestly to development of a talent for the sake of excellence in an art or science. If theses G and H are correct, then such an agent cannot be entirely wholehearted. If a conflict between his cares emerges, he lacks an ethical framework through which he can develop his present cares or articulate new cares that remain faithful to what was right in the old cares, loyal to the same ultimate values. Such an aesthete can thus manifest unity-2 for protracted periods in life, but he refuses to recognize the deeper ethical frame of reference within which the particular values he cares about are situated and rooted. Ethical ideals cannot be appropriated as just one more project alongside others; to take them seriously is to recognize the responsibility to give them priority and thus to become wholehearted through willing the good.

Hence the ethical stage is distinguished from *all* subtypes of the aesthetic only by unity-3 in Kierkegaard's analysis. This is the unity illuminated in Kierkegaard's picture of the strongest conceivable form of ethical selfhood in his discourse on "Purity of Heart." Its overall point is to ask us the existential question about our lives as a whole: "*What kind of life is yours; do you will one thing, and what is this one thing?*" (UDVS, 126/SKS 8, 226). But Kierkegaard is clear that this question about unity-3 can be fully intelligible to us only if we already have ethically informed commitments, or have "chosen the ethical" in the Judge's sense:

> Before being able to answer this earnest question earnestly, a person must already have chosen in life, chosen the invisible, the internal; he must live in such a way that he has hours and periods in which he collects his mind so that his life can attain the transparency that is a condition for being able to submit the question to himself and to answer it (UDVS, 126–27/SKS 8, 227).[29]

Thus although we rarely ask this question about our "whole life," concern about the ethical status of our other cares and personal projects should push us toward this question. Kierkegaard thinks it can only be answered through wholehearted devotion to "the good," including a willingness to suffer long and even die for it (UDVS, 78–82/SKS 8, 184–88). This devotion is a temporally extended process that persists through lived time up to death.[30] This involves a kind of infinite resignation; it is our effort that matters, since success in the outcome is never assured by our trying (UDVS, 88–90/SKS 8, 191–95). And the ever-growing robust meaning that a wholehearted life has to its agent must end in her death, when only the good she willed remains (UDVS, 27/SKS 8, 141). So we have to consider that the subjective meaning of our life will acquire *ultimate* meaning—an objective significance that no longer changes, that is eternal; in that sense, one who is dead always "remains true to himself . . . one and the same" (UDVS, 55/SKS 8, 165). This is why "a sense of shame before one who is dead" is edifying (UDVS, 54/SKS 8, 164), for it is equivalent to the "voice of conscience" that is the judgment of our life (as lived so far) in eternal perspective (UDVS, 127–28/SKS 8, 228–29).

The link to Kierkegaard's discourse "At a Graveside" is clear here: For "the certainty of death" is the *universal obstacle* to the complete realization of our intentions in time (TDIO, 95/SKS 5, 463), even when our powers are otherwise sufficient (which is rare enough). True wholehearted willing must be able to persevere in light of this recognition. This conception of

wholeheartedness depends on the idea that at death, our practical identity *is* eternally what it has become, our freedom to change ends and our character is *forever fixed*. There are weak and strong versions of this idea—while the former require no specific faith in life after death, the latter are explicitly eschatological. For example, Kierkegaard suggests that the "change of eternity" following death seals our will into its final form; if we pursued something other than the highest good as our ultimate concern, then our spirit is forever divided against itself (UDVS, 29/SKS 8, 142). On the other hand, the person who is unified by a wish that "pertains essentially to [his] whole life" and who suffers for the good in "faith and hope" finds a new hope and a love that never dies on "the other side of death" (UDVS, 99–101/SKS 8, 203–5).

Thus the volitional conditions of narrative unity-3 including infinite resignation finally bring us to the special problem that death appears to pose for narrative unity in one's identity. Does this mean that the will cannot in fact be "whole," that the very conditions of wholeheartedness finally prevent the unity built up by ethical willing from being tied together in narrative completion? It might seem that the analysis up to this point even strengthens the mortality-objection to narrativist accounts of practical identity. Yet as we will see, Kierkegaard again has an answer.

Narrative Unity-3, Mortality, and Kierkegaardian Eschatological Faith

Three versions of the problem. Although it is frequently alleged that death somehow makes narrative unity of a "whole" life impossible, it is not easy to pin down precisely what the problem is. On some construals, it seems to be the impossibility of the actual end of my story being meaningful to me. In response to MacIntyre, for example, Lippitt says, "If my death is necessarily not an event in my life, I cannot grasp it as an episode in the story of my life."[31] Kierkegaard agrees: "in death's decision, all is over and . . . the transformation cannot fall in line with other events as a new event" in the agent's life (TDIO, 99/SKS 5, 467). From an immanent perspective in any case, my being-dead is not a *living event* in my narravive; once this event is actual, I'm not there to experience it.

But when put this way, the problem also seems to have a good answer developed both by Kierkegaard and Heidegger: I certainly can grasp the fact that I will die in anticipatory understanding, and thus experience my mortality (the certainty of my temporal finitude) as part of the overall meaning of my life before my death has happened. Since I may not

correctly predict the circumstances and time of my death, when it comes, it will probably leave some of my projects unfinished; moreover the manner in which I face it in my last few moments or hours could also undermine the main themes and commitments of my life. But that is precisely what "anticipatory resoluteness" toward death is supposed to prevent. In infinite resignation, the meaning of my cares to me cannot depend on their completeability in time, and I will try to die with courage, even sacrificing my life for my ground projects if necessary (though of course most people do not get such a chance). Earnestness chooses "work that does not depend on whether one is granted a lifetime to complete it well or only a brief time to have begun it well" (TDIO, 96/SKS 5, 464; compare UDVS, 141/SKS 8, 239).

Still, this may be an uncharitable construal of the objection. It may say instead that, without special religious beliefs, we must assume that we cannot experience the state of *our being* dead; thus we cannot see what our finished life-story actually is. Until then, it seems that things could always unfold more than one way for us, so the future is "always a threat to whatever 'unity' I may have achieved."[32] On this view, even if my narravive is strengthened by anticipation of a death that is certain to come eventually and may come at any moment, I still experience my narravive as fragmentary and open to a final twist that reverses or negates much of what mattered to me. Thus Sartre argues that sudden death is often "absurd" while few people's ending is like the beautiful chord that culminates a long melody.[33] This indeterminacy, like freedom according to Sartre, is a source of angst. The risky openness ceases only when I have permanently ceased to experience anything, when it is too late to experience full closure (at least in this life). In short, I lack the kind of control that would be necessary for my death to be integrated into an autonomous life-meaning.

To this version of the objection, there are at least two important responses. First, as often as existential writers have made this claim, I think it is an exaggeration. People often *do* know, or have a pretty good idea, that they will probably die soon (even within some specified time period). Although absolute certainty is impossible, since wild contingencies could always postpone or hasten their demise, they have some time to prepare and decide how to act—a few months, a day, minutes, or maybe just a few precious seconds in which to make final decisions. It is highly plausible that such "final moments" are often filled with tremendous significance for the agent living them out, as many literary and film depictions have shown to great effect. Even if we can do little but suffer with courage, or make a last remark, it can bring closure. Consider in this light the great

significance people often place on "last words," such as Jesus's last words on the cross, "it is finished." There seems to be a clear sense of completion, even peace, in its simplicity. Contrast Kurtz's haunting last utterance, "the horror, the horror."[34] In this, we hear a sense of failure so absolute that it assumes eschatological proportions; it is a breath of damnation.

This is a subject deserving more phenomenological study. We have often heard that in the seconds before death, the person experiences something like a terrifying or awe-inspiring rerun of their life. Sometimes people also manage in their last few minutes to act in ways that express their practical identity: Consider the Holocaust victim who became a professor at Virginia Tech, who barred the door with his body against the shooter to give his students time to escape out the window. Of course, many people die without warning. Probably Abraham Lincoln experienced nothing at Ford's Theater other than the players on stage, a loud noise, and sudden loss of consciousness. And yet, in another sense, he was *not* entirely "unprepared." He did not expect or imagine this specific death, but for years he had known and accepted that assassination was a real danger. On leaving Springfield, at the train station, he told his friends and neighbors that he feared he might never return there. Thus, although he had no chance to finish the business of Reconstruction, he may have experienced his life as unified by the purposes for which he was willing to die. This experience, gained through much effort and reflection, could have been present to him at the prereflective level even as Booth raised his gun. We do not need time to "put our affairs in order" for our will to be "in order," ready for death. Nor do we need to make a "momentous ending" (TDIO, 72/SKS 5, 443), as Kierkegaard says.

Thus if the objection is that the time or manner of my death might undo the meaning that my life has for me in its final moments, the response is that freedom only needs to make deep narrative unity possible, not to ensure it. It is up to us to choose so that either (i) our final moments faithfully express our identity rather than undoing us, or (ii) our sense of embracing meaning continues right up to our sudden end, if it happens that way. Thus Kierkegaard thinks that witnessing a "sudden death" can help us realize that "as soon as one is dead it is too late to become earnest" (TDIO, 74/SKS 5, 445). Thus the absurd loss of meaning that Sartre finds in sudden death is only on the surface, or from the external biographical point of view; inwardly, for infinite resignation, it is false that "one minute more or less may perhaps change everything."[35] We do not need to wait to see what our freedom will do, as if we are doomed to be passive spectators of a final choice that affects the meaning of all our past choices; we can become resolute now.[36]

However, there is a third way to construe the objection: Our narravive can never achieve *complete closure* because, as beings of finite powers and limited time but indefinitely extending interests and aspirations, there is always more we would do or say if death could be postponed even for a day, an hour, a minute. In that sense, the loose ends of our story can never all be tied up in time; our narravive *must* be fragmentary at its end, leaving threads that we either experience as incomplete or would so experience if we knew our death was imminent. To a biographer, these storylines will appear merely cut off in midstream. So, Sartre says, the value of our efforts becomes indeterminate;[37] even if we have been wholehearted and feel a blessed contentment on our deathbed, inevitably some things will still feel unfinished if our memory is still working.

Kierkegaard's answer. Of the three construals, this last one is as irresistible as the fact that no one who enters the ethical can finish life without any regrets, with nothing he would change. But this does not mean that our death cannot be part of our living narravive. It is precisely because they are two sides of the same "existential incompleteness" that Kierkegaard pairs regret with guilt as "two guides" that "call" to a person to change while she still can. Thus guilt can be sharp when we feel that death is near:

> [W]hether you are guilty of much or have left much undone, the guilt makes this an eleventh-hour call; the concern of inwardness, which regret sharpens, grasps that this is at the eleventh hour. In the temporal sense, old age is the eleventh hour, and the moment of death the last moment of the eleventh hour. . . . but repentance and regret belong to the eternal in a human being, and thus every time repentance comprehends the guilt it comprehends that it is in the eleventh hour (UDVS, 14–15/SKS 8, 129–30).

In this key passage, we see the core of Kierkegaard's answer: The incompleteness recognized in the objection can *itself* be made the basis for earnest reflection on the whole direction of our life. Without a contingent life-crisis or looming threat (such as a terminal diagnosis), we can always see ourselves as running out of time. Notice Kierkegaard's wording: for a brief span of time, it is *as if* the midnight hour has already struck, as if we are already dead and our story finished, absolutely unchangeable. Thus we do experience "being dead" *metaphorically* as being out of time, much as we anticipate the heart-stopping "pencils down!" command at the end of a vital test. Of course, to feel this, we have to realize that we are taking a test and care about it—just as consciousness that our life will have an eternal meaning is the condition for asking the existential question

earnestly, making it "the fundamental condition for willing one thing in truth" (UDVS, 127/SKS 8, 227).

Thus Stokes is right that such an edifying "copresence with death" in imagination requires an infinite interest in the moral quality of my life.[38] In thinking of death as "your lot" in this way, "you are then doing what death is indeed unable to do—namely, that you are and death also is" (TDIO, 75/SKS 5, 446). This enigmatic phrase means that, in the earnest thought of our own death, we actually extend our narravive to *include* our death as a possibility imaginatively actualized; in the mirror of eternity, we see ourselves as though we have lost the freedom to change yet *continue* to experience meaning.[39] As a result, we briefly exist in a kind of living death; we experience what it would "be like" to be dead, or to be unable to alter our narravive, and as if we were able to experience its final meaning.[40] We think ourselves into the state in which "all is over" for us (TDIO, 79/SKS 5, 449). This paradox is the limit of the narrative unity that mortal persons can achieve by their own efforts; we feel the *narravive* significance of "being out of time" not just for one important task, but for *all* our purposes and cares. Kierkegaard calls this the "decisiveness" of death. Nothing more can be added; "the meaning" of our life "is at an end" (TDIO, 78/SKS 5, 450).[41]

This experience does two things for us. First, it makes us measure the wholeheartedness of our commitments according to whether they are still worthwhile to us when seen in this light, as stopped by the final bell. We see whether in living death, we would still affirm our cares and the ways we pursued them. If we cannot, then we are not wholehearted about those purposes to the point of infinite resignation; when our narravive is stretched forward to overlap our death, some cares appear less worthwhile. We are "halted . . . in order to renounce vain pursuits" (TDIO, 77/SKS 5, 448).[42] Second, since we can never affirm everything about our practical identity, we feel a measureless longing for more time to correct it. That is, we feel the infinite loss of being out of time with something vital as yet undone. A child who thinks of the right answer the second after the test is whisked away can barely imagine the regret we feel in this paradoxical state.

But after earnestly imagining ourselves at the midnight hour, when we regret infinitely that we are out of time, we realize that in fact we are "still living," that we are *not* actually out of time yet, though we could be soon. So it is only the eleventh hour after all, and we can still change our answer to the existential question, and thus the final meaning of our life! This experience combines both ethical urgency and the joy of unexpected

reprieve, as if the test proctor had said, "Actually, I see that you have a few more minutes." Then

> the thought of death gives the earnest person the right momentum in life and the right goal . . . Then earnestness grasps the present this very day, disdains no task as too insignificant, rejects no time as too short, works with all its might even though it is willing to smile at itself if this effort is said to be merit before God (TDIO, 83/SKS 5, 453).

In other words, authenticity in the face of death strengthens the will to sustain infinite resignation in willing the good in everything we pursue; it seals unity-3 in a "love . . . strong as death,"[43] but without hubris.

Because this limit of authentic willing is reached through imaginative inclusion of our own death in our narravive, it is a paradoxical act ripe for representation in literary form, as many stories of ghosts, or recently deceased spirits, or near-death experiences suggest. None of these narratives can quite capture the paradoxical synthesis required, because to some extent they must portray the agent either as second person looking at her or his life from the outside, or as continuing to act and change in death. But the double movement—into being-out-of-time, followed by the shift back to living freedom, in which our remaining time and open future appear in a radically new light—is perhaps best portrayed in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol.* In the company of the terrible "Ghost of Christmas Future," Scrooge first sees servants happy to sell their dead master's trifles, and a debtor relieved that his creditor is deceased.[44] He enters the house of his own assistant Bob Cratchit and sees the family grieve over the recent death of their son, Tiny Tim. Finally, the Ghost brings Scrooge to an unkempt graveyard, where he sees his own name on his grave and realizes that it was *his* life that no one missed.[45] In this awful revelation, he fears infinitely that he is out of time, that his story cannot be changed. But he begs for consolation, for one more chance.

Note that there is no explicit fear of divine punishment here, nor any descent into hell (as in the famous 1964 Technicolor musical film version). What appalls Scrooge is the final meaning of this narravive, the story of a man who did no good for anyone. What he cannot bear, what he rejects now with all his heart, is the life of a man who let Tiny Tim die. This turning lies within the ethical; it does not require faith in an afterlife. As if echoing Dickens, Kierkegaard cites a literary example of a youth who dreamed he was an old man looking "back over a wasted life, until he woke in anxiety New Year's morning not only to a new year but to a new life" (TDIO, 76/SKS 5, 446–47). A life whose final meaning is entirely negative is itself sufficiently damning to have an apotropaic influence on the will that takes it to heart, as Scrooge does. What he fears most is that he is "past hope" for *this* life, for his time on Earth to mean something better.[46]

So on awakening and finding himself still alive on Christmas morning, Scrooge has the kind of experience that Tolkien calls a "eucatastrophe," namely the joy of a reprieve beyond all rational hope that is felt as grace.[47] There is a strong analogy to faith here, for in his last moments with the final Ghost, Scrooge clings to one sign that what he has seen are "shadows of things that may be only," that his fate is not totally sealed.[48] Hence his infinite joy on Christmas morning that "[t]he Time before him was his own, to make amends" parallels the joy of faith justified by miracle, eschatological trust vindicated by the "absurd."[49] And indeed Scrooge's delight in every small detail shows the dramatic paradigm shift in the meaning of temporality for him:

> He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses and up to the windows, and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness.[50]

This sounds remarkably like de silentio's "knight of faith" who finds all temporality fresh and new, who sees the miracle in every moment. But something close to this can still be felt by the person who has only achieved infinite resignation, for, "supported by the earnest thought of death, the earnest person says 'All is not over'" (TDIO, 85/SKS 5, 454). She recognizes then that "time also is a good" (TDIO, 83/SKS 5, 453). The indeterminate time remaining to her now appears as precious beyond measure, a chance to make a narravive worth having lived out to the last. The open possibility of the future is now appreciated with new inwardness: Scrooge says, "I am here—the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled."[51] The remainder of his narravive becomes a wholehearted will to the good in truth. As Dickens explicitly recognizes, this is an achievement of *narrative unity.* Both as he is leaving the final Ghost, and again on awakening, Scrooge vows, "I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all three shall strive within me."[52]

At this limit, unity-3 does become more complex. In answering the existential question about what his entire narravive will mean, the person

attains what Kierkegaard calls a "wish that pertains essentially to the whole of life" (UDVS, 100/SKS 8, 204). As we see with Scrooge, this unifying wish may not be clearly formed until later in life, but it reaches backwards to transform the meaning of everything that has transpired up to that point; past errors become reasons to make restitution. Yet toward the future, it works to cultivate continuity of purpose that can last and reconciles with the possibility that the work may be ended by death at any moment: "Earnestness, therefore, becomes the living of each day as if it were the last and also the first in a long life" (TDIO, 96/SKS 5, 464). The second half of this formula expresses the agent's ethical determination; the first half expresses her infinite resignation. This is the ideal result of integrating the fact of mortality into wholehearted willing.

Conclusion: from unity-3 to faith. Admittedly, a paradox remains in this solution: Authenticity in relation to our mortality completes our narrative unity precisely by making us recognize the incompleteness of our narravive and prompting us to fix whatever is out of tune, to achieve harmony while time remains, while recognizing that we will not completely succeed. Since we can never attain that perfect harmony, it always impels us forward—until it really is too late. In that sense, I grant to the skeptics about narrative identity that there is a kind of narrative unity—call it unity-4—that we never do attain in this life. We are disunified and fragmentary in relation to this ideal, though the thought of death can have power in moving us closer to unity-4.

This concession amounts to saying that there is one problem of death that narrative theories require faith to answer: there is a point beyond which an immanent conception of narrative unity cannot go. Consider a closely related problem: at death, a narravive apparently goes out of existence; only narratives about it remain.[53] In this, there seems to be an infinite loss; this whole web of experiences, acts, and feelings, with all their meaning to the agent, should not vanish "like tears in the rain," as Roy says just before his death in the film *Blade Runner.* When this is felt to be a problem, we have crossed from purely ethical into religious categories. The issue becomes the preservation of narravive meanings in some kind of hereafter, so that all one's ethical strivings (and even one's failings) are not "for nothing" in the ultimate scheme of things. This is more than ethical ideals in themselves demand; here the motive of narrative unity actually transcends the ethical in asking for an ultimate meaning to our efforts and sufferings.

If narravive meaning is to be preserved *eternally yet as* narravive, then the agent's "life" in some sense must continue eternally. But if it continues, cannot its earthly work be completed then? Cannot our unfinished work be shown to us finally in its finished form? Can we not live the full meaning of this completion, experience the infinite plenitude of its significance? As if an artist saw her unfinished masterpiece now laid out before her, in every detail, better than she could ever have hoped? This is the eschatological narrative unity we sought but could never reach as finite mortal persons. If that is right, then the narrative structure of practical identity is incomplete in the final analysis because it points toward a telos in which we can only have faith.

NOTES

1. See John Lippitt's review of John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd, eds., *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre,* in *Faith and Philosophy* 22, no. 4 (October 2005): pp. 496–502; Lippitt, "Telling Tales: Johannes Climacus and Narrative Unity," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2005,* ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Herman Deuser, pp. 71–89 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005); and Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight: Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, and Some Problems with Narrative Unity," *Inquiry* 50, no. 1 (February 2007): pp. 34–69.

2. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), ch. 15.

3. Kathy Behrendt, "Reasons to be Fearful: Strawson, Death, and Narrative," in *Narrative Understanding and Persons,* ed. Daniel D. Hutto, pp. 133–54 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

4. Patrick Stokes, "The Power of Death: Retroactivity, Narrative, and Interest," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Prefaces/Writing Sampler and Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions,* ed. Robert L. Perkins, pp. 387–417 (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2006).

5. Stokes, "The Power of Death," p. 396, referring to George Pitcher, "The Misfortunes of the Dead," in *The Metaphysics of Death,* ed. John M. Fischer, pp. 159–68 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

6. Stokes, "The Power of Death," p. 403.

7. Stokes, "The Power of Death," pp. 405–6. Yet Stokes recognizes that for Kierkegaard, in the right practical attitude of interested imagination of my possible future death, I can attain a certain "copresence" with my death or even identity with my "posthumous self" (pp. 414–15).

8. Anthony Rudd, "Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, and Narrative Unity—Reply to Lippitt," *Inquiry* 50, no. 5 (October 2007): pp. 541–49; and Rudd, "In Defense of Narrative," *European Journal of Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (March 2009): pp. 60–75. Also see Rudd's forthcoming book on self and identity. My full response to Lippitt is contained in an essay titled "Narrative Identity and Autonomy: A Kierkegaardian Approach" (unpublished manuscript).

9. Anthony Rudd, "Reason in Ethics Revisited: *Either/Or,* 'Criterionless Choice,' and Narrative Unity," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2008,* ed. Niels

Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and K. Brian Söderquist, pp. 192–93 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008).

10. Harry G. Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 166; "wholeheartedness" is closely related to "decisive identification" (pp. 168–69), and to "volitional necessity" in Frankfurt's work.

11. See Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 11–13.

12. See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 4; and Taylor, "What Is Human Agency?" in *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

13. In John J. Davenport, "Kierkegaard, Anxiety, and the Will," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2001*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and Jon Stewart, pp. 158–81 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001). The same claim is defended briefly in Davenport, "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics," in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, ed. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd, pp. 265–324 (Chicago: Open Court, 2001).

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

15. Lippitt, "Telling Tales," pp. 75–76.

16. As the pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus suggests in the "Decisive Expression" section of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

17. See Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About," in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 80–94. In this essay, Frankfurt claims 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, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 9, 37.

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

19. This is the sort of answer I suggested in "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics," pp. 294–301. Also see John J. Davenport, *Will as Commitment and Resolve* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), ch. 14.

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

21. 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.

22. I use subscript numbers to distinguish "first-order" and "second-order" caring and volition without an awkward sentence structure.

23. 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 awaken to the existential importance of caring; a person who is avoiding higher-order volitions and strong evaluation has to see the emptiness of his negative project; a heroic aesthete has to discover the way that her cares depend on a larger ethical framework to be fully meaningful.

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

25. As we see in "The Rotation of Crops," in *Either/Or* vol. 1. See my discussion "Kierkegaard and Frankfurt on BS, Wantonness, and Aestheticism," forthcoming in Myron Penner and Søren Landkildehus, eds., *Living Reasonably, Loving Well: Conversing with Frankfurt and Kierkegaard*.

26. See Davenport, "The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice between the Aesthetic and the Ethical: A Response to MacIntyre," in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, ed. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd, p. 95 (Chicago: Open Court, 2001).

27. See "The Seducer's Diary," in *Either/Or*, vol. 1.

28. See Rick Anthony Furtak, "The Virtues of Authenticity: A Kierkegaardian Essay in Moral Psychology," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 43, no.1 (December 2003): pp. 423–38.

29. Thus the *initial* question of the discourse is whether we will the good, or (in my terms) have started on unity-2 understood as requiring personal appropriation of ethical norms. If so, "then it would be possible that he could will one thing." Then comes the *main* question concerning whether we will the good in truth or will everything for the good, or through its regulation, or within its overriding value (UDVS, 121/SKS 8, 222). This main question involves the narrative question about one's whole life (UDVS, 100/SKS 8, 204).

30. Lippitt suggests that "purity of heart" in Kierkegaard's sense is not a form of narrative unity ("Getting the Story Straight," p. 51). My response to this analyzes "On the Occasion of a Confession" to show that its typology of "doublemindedness" agrees with the distinctions among types of aesthetes in my list (for this argument, see my manuscript, "Narrative Identity and Autonomy").

31. Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p. 45.

32. Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p. 46 (citing Heidegger).

33. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square, 1966), pp. 685–87.

34. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin Classics, 1973), p. 111.

35. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 689.

36. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 688.

37. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 690.

38. Stokes, "The Power of Death," pp. 414–16.

39. This explains why Heidegger held that in resoluteness toward death, Dasein can become "a whole" or achieve narrative unity; see *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1962), pp. 343–48 (H297–301). Interestingly, Charles Guignon argues in the following chapter that Heidegger's sense of wholeness cannot be understood in this way.

40. I suggest that what Heidegger means by "death" as the "impossibility of Dasein" is precisely this loss of possibilities, the absolute inability to change, the

fixity of an essence; the loss of "being" in the case of Dasein means the loss of freedom.

41. Kierkegaard also notes that in life, the contemplation of a meaning that seems entirely finished becomes "in turn part of the meaning," showing that it was not finished. This is Mulhall's point cited by Lippitt ("Getting the Story Straight," p. 45). However, it does *not* apply to the finish that death makes (TDIO, 78/SKS 5, 449). By implication, when we earnestly imagine ourselves as dead, we imagine a state in which our *experiencing* being-out-of-time does not add anything to our narravive; we fully coincide with this narravive that we experience as closed. In Sartre's terms, it is as if we experience being a narravive that is now exactly what it is. Sartre says this is impossible, but it is not impossible in the earnest thought of our death, according to Kierkegaard. If this is correct, we have isolated a deep point of disagreement. It helps explain why Sartre cannot accept that death is meaningful to us as a "closing of the account . . . which makes one finally be what one has been—irremediably" (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 689). For Sartre, this can only amount to our becoming a mere thing, an object of biographical debate and the memory of others (p. 692), while for Kierkegaard, it is our freely developed *character* that is "fixed"—an event full of significance.

42. See Sheridan Hough, "'Halting Is Movement:' The Paradoxical Pause of Confession in 'An Occasional Discourse,'" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, pp. 37–51 (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2005).

43. Song of Solomon 8:6 (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed., edited by Michael D. Coogan [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001]).

44. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, in Dickens, *Christmas Books*, int. Eleanor Farjeon, in *Oxford Illustrated Dickens* set (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 59–66.

45. Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, pp. 67–70.

46. Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, p. 70.

47. See J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *Tree and Leaf* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), pp. 11–79. Also see Davenport, "Happy Endings and Religious Hope: *The Lord of the Rings* as an Epic Fairy Tale," in *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy*, ed. Gregory Bassham and Eric Bronson, pp. 204–18 (Chicago: Open Court, 2003).

48. Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, p. 70.

49. See my trilogy on existential faith: Davenport, "Faith as Eschatological Trust in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*," in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: A Philosophical Engagement*, ed. Edward F. Mooney, pp. 196–233 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2008); Davenport, "Kierkegaard's *Postscript* in Light of *Fear and Trembling*," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 64, no. 2–4 (2008): pp. 879–908; and Davenport, "What Kierkegaardian Faith Adds to Alterity Ethics," in *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion*, ed. J. Aaron Simmons and David Wood, pp. 169–95 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

50. Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, p. 74.

51. Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, p. 71.

52. Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, p. 70–71.

53. See Stokes's discussion of this point in relation to *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* in "The Power of Death," p. 412. This is also the problem that Unamuno found so burning and central. It is hard to assess, since many secular thinkers today seem not to find it a problem at all. See Thaddeus Metz, "Recent Work on the Meaning of Life," *Ethics* 112 (July 2002): pp. 781–814.