Forgiveness and the Rat Man: Kierkegaard, ‘narrative unity’ and ‘wholeheartedness’ revisited

John Lippitt

1. Introduction

It is surprising to write a couple of articles and receive a book in response. Yet such has been the flattering reception my own modest contribution to the debate about whether or not Kierkegaard should be classed as a ‘narrativist’ in any interesting sense (Lippitt 2005, 2007). Both John J. Davenport (the author of the book in question) and Anthony Rudd have in recent work sought to clarify the conception of ‘narrative’ that they see as operative in Kierkegaard (Davenport 2011, 2012; Rudd 2007b, 2008, 2012). In doing so, both have revised and qualified their positions in various respects, enabling them to sidestep some worries that talk of ‘narrative’ had sponsored. The gap between Kierkegaardian ‘narrativists’ and ‘narratosceptics’ has narrowed considerably: the positions of the former now appear to be much closer to that which Philip Quinn (2001) and I had advocated in the earlier debate. One significant disagreement remaining, however, concerns the desirability of ‘wholeheartedness’ as a key dimension of the ‘narrative unity’ on which Davenport insists. That will be my concern here.

---

1 In regard to some of the ‘narratosceptic’ objections outlined in this volume’s introduction, see, for instance, Davenport’s distancing from MacIntyre’s use of literary narrative as a guide to human life and his explicit recognition of the ‘incompleteness thesis’ about literary depictions of lives (2012: 52-9); the revision of talk of one’s ‘whole life’ to mean talk about something like the general shape of the most important values in one’s life (more of which below); and Rudd’s acknowledgement that the inextricably ethical nature of the ‘narrative unity’ with which the Judge confronts A had been downplayed in his earlier work (2012: 170). The defence of moral realism in both writers is also more explicit than before.
2. Davenport’s new position on narrative unity

In what he recognises to be a new account of ‘narrative unity’, Davenport outlines five different levels thereof, each of which is ‘necessary but not sufficient for the ones after it’ (2011: 163). 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’ (2012: 45). In response to an earlier objection, Davenport now explicitly agrees that the aesthetes of Kierkegaard’s Either/Or, such as A and the Seducer, indeed possess both these levels of unity (2012: 47). What they lack, he claims, is unity-2: ‘continuity of cares through willed devotion to ends, persons and ideals’ (2011: 163; cf. 2012: 47-8). It is commitments involving higher-order volitions (in a broadly Frankfurterian sense) which ‘actively sustain the agent’s projects and relationships over time’ (ibid.). So while aesthetes possess unity-1, they lack unity-2. As A puts it, ‘No part of life ought to have so much meaning for a person that he cannot forget it any moment he wants to’ (EO I, 293/SKS 2, 282). Neither aesthete recognises the existence of any values that have normative authority for their cares (2012: 107; cf. Rudd 2008a: 195). Unity-3 amounts to a version of ‘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)

---

2 Davenport quotes this passage in support of his view, but somewhat selectively. A’s discussion at this part of ‘Crop Rotation’ is about the inter-relationship of forgetting and recollecting. He insists that forgetting is an ‘art’ and that the ability ‘to forget depends upon how one remembers’. Immediately after the passage Davenport quotes, A adds ‘on the other hand, every single part of life ought to have so much meaning for a person that he can remember it at any moment’ (ibid.).
remaining open to learning new values and accepting criticism of her existing cares.’

(2011: 163, my emphases)

Finally, there is unity-4, a motivating ideal of ‘perfect harmony’ that, in a concession to the ‘mortality objection’, 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’ (2012: 166). This introduces the importance of Tolkeinian eucatastrophe, on which Davenport has written interestingly elsewhere, and the related importance of hope (Davenport 2008a, 2008b; Lippitt 2014).

Davenport’s distinction between these levels of narrative unity helps to clarify some key, but previously opaque, aspects of the narrative realist case. Elements of his account, such as the strikingly realist notion of a narravive (2012: 70-90) will surely prove controversial. But here I shall focus on unity-3 (wholeheartedness).

A major issue in this debate has always been how best to describe the kind of shaping of a life that virtually all critics recognise to be necessary to some extent. (The disagreement is about to what extent.) Recall here Quinn’s objection that too strong a concern with narrative unity brings the danger of simplifying by exclusion (both in the proclivity to tell stories about our past that are self-deceptive, and to ‘miss the adventure’ in our futures (Lippitt 2007: 52-58)). Instead, Quinn recommended we ‘welcome plural values into our lives, risking the possibility of tragic conflict among them, and ... manage the inevitable tensions as creatively and skilfully as we can’ (2001: 333). Davenport’s new version of unity-3 attempts to recognise worries about monomania (in d) and ‘missing the adventure’ (in e). He
acknowledges that ‘the importance of unity does not imply that we should never risk instrumental difficulties due to plural cares; the value of wholeheartedness for a meaningful life only implies that we should not take such risks lightly or unnecessarily’ (2012: 119). He further acknowledges: ‘There are also unusual circumstances in which the importance of openness to different values might itself justify tolerating, for a time, conflict among cares that may turn out to be essential conflict’ (ibid.). While maintaining the narrative unity terminology, this seems to give Quinn and I pretty much what we asked for.

However, several questions arise about narrative unity. As a preliminary, note that as before, this is a very formal, abstract account. What interests me is whether it is adequate to address practical issues at the level of the phenomenology of a lived life, and this will only emerge at the level of detail. The problem here is that narratosceptic worries about self-deception re-emerge at this point, as I convince myself that I’ve done enough (made a ‘reasonable effort’) and listened enough (‘remained open’). As we shall see, perhaps Davenport would dismiss these concerns as merely ‘pragmatic’ (2012: 111). However, in what follows, I want also to focus on whether Davenport is wise to stick with Frankfurt’s ‘wholeheartedness’ terminology despite, in other ways, going well beyond his position.

3. Davenport and Frankfurt on wholeheartedness

Davenport’s account of wholeheartedness differs from Frankfurt’s in several key respects. First, Davenport’s commitment to moral realism meansthat for him, the caring central to unity depends on what agents take to be objective values, and so unity at this level requires coherence amongst these values. Davenport is now clearer that he intends ‘wholeheartedness’

---

3 Though how clear is it what this claim amounts to, given legitimate disagreements as to what constitutes a reasonable appetite for risk?
as a regulative good, so the relations (and potential conflicts) between an agent’s central cares are crucial. He distinguishes between two varieties of such conflict: ‘instrumental’ and ‘essential’ (2012: 111). The former – such as where two ends compete for limited resources of time or energy – simply requires ‘pragmatic’ resolution, and he denies that a narrative realist owes us an account of how diverse interests and values are supposed to be reconciled with the need for focus that arises from our finitude. ‘Essential’ conflict involves inconsistent strong evaluations (in Charles Taylor’s sense) of our goals and pursuits (2012: 109). Davenport acknowledges that this may not be obvious in advance: ‘Sometimes it is only through caring that we can understand well enough the values involved in what we care about to recognize subtle ways in which they are opposed’ (2012: 111). Note, therefore, that there is a pragmatic problem for even ‘essential’ conflict, which is what my earlier question - ‘how do we decide, in the case of all but the most obviously incompatible ends, whether they are harmonious or not?’ (2005: 75) – was an attempt to get at.

Davenport develops as follows his account of how we need to go beyond Frankfurt. His own account of wholehearted caring involves both negative and positive conditions. The negative condition is that we need to avoid essential conflict between our higher order volitions and between our specific cares. (As noted above, this is easier specified than achieved.) The positive condition is that we should take sufficient account of what values are worth caring about in our specific circumstances, and should also devote serious attention to each care (2012: 112). This again acknowledges the narratosceptic worry that one might otherwise get wholeheartedness ‘on the cheap’ through lack of imagination or monomania. Thus wholeheartedness as Davenport conceives it plays a regulative role: ‘Instead of teleological unification under a single finite goal, wholeheartedness is normally realized in the practical harmony between the main themes of our life established by our primary cares’ (2012: 115;
cf. Rudd 2007: 545). What he calls the regulative thesis about unity-3 can be stated as does Rudd (whom Davenport cites):

‘In aiming, as I do, at various distinct goals, I have to take into account that these are all things that I am trying to achieve, and that how I set about one project will inevitably be affected by how I set about others. A typical life narrative will not be a story of the pursuit of one single goal, but the story of how the protagonist attempts (successfully or not) to coordinate his/her different projects and goals with one another. So an agent who is committed to making space in his or her life for Work, Family, Leisure, Creativity etc. will do so on the basis of considering them all as valuable aspects of the one life that he or she has to lead, and will therefore have to be concerned with how they all fit together.’ (2009: 64-5)

At this level, I have no quarrel. But there is room for significant misunderstanding here. In an immediately following footnote, Rudd alleges that I previously claimed that the need to manage one’s time gives only an ‘utterly trivial sense’ to the idea of a unified life. Instead, he points out that our finitude and temporality mean we are faced with various tough choices in attempting to marry the demands of work, family life, etc. (2009: 73). In fact, I have no problem with such an uncontroversial claim. Far from denying that we need to weigh up such goods, I explicitly said, in my discussion of John Christman, that ‘Christman’s point here, I take it, is not that I do not need to decide how to balance the demands of work and family commitments, for example, in my life’ (2007: 46). There has never been a disagreement between Davenport, Rudd and myself on the importance of such reflection. Rather, I took Christman’s point to be ‘that I should not necessarily feel any obligation to bring each and every aspect of my life under one grand narrative. For example, my life is ethically none the worse for the fact that I have given little if any thought to the question of how to “unify” my life *qua* gardener with my life *qua* soccer fan. (Except in the utterly trivial sense that I can’t tend the roses while at the game.) Yet any account of my “whole life” - unless that phrase turns out to mean vastly less than it promises – will have to take such factors into account’ (2007: 46-7, first emphasis added). It is only in the above parenthesis that I used the phrase ‘utterly trivial’. It is now clearer that for both Rudd and Davenport, what my ‘whole life’ actually means is something like ‘those aspects of my life which constitute goods between which I have to find a sensible balance if my life is to constitute living in the light of, and “for”, the good’. Fine: but then can we not find a less misleading phrase? My explicit point was precisely about the unclarity of what talk of one’s ‘whole life’ amounts to (2007: 47). Such an over-egged phrase threatens to obscure what is valuable about this evaluative, reflective retrospective and planning dimension of practical reason. In this sense, the proffered meaning does indeed turn out to offer less than it promises. Charles Taylor’s talk of ‘the shape of my life *as a whole*’ (1989: 50) is perhaps better, provided we emphasise ‘shape’.
Rudd is right to say that finding a balance between work and family life is ‘an absolutely central issue in the lives of very many people’ (2009: 65). But when he adds that ‘to brush it aside with the comment that these are just two distinct “sequences of a person’s life [which] proceed quite independently of each other” would be absurd’ (ibid.), he attacks a straw man, since neither I nor Christman (as I interpreted him) is saying this. Rudd acknowledges in a further footnote that he is unsure whether Christman means to say this about

‘tension between such major commitments as family and career. But if he wouldn’t, that would seem to leave his comment about the separateness of our narratives applying only to minor and trivial concerns. This is more or less analytic; a concern would be minor and trivial for X by definition if X didn’t care enough about it to worry about how to balance it with other perceived goods in his/her life. Anything that we find important enough to care about is something that we have to balance with other goods in thinking about how to live our lives.’ (2009: 73; cf. 2012: 187-8)

Slight ambiguities about the meaning of ‘care’ aside, I think Rudd here agrees with what was my point: that the kind of evaluative, backward-looking reflection and forward-looking planning that matters in human lives does not need to be extended to one’s ‘whole life’ in any literal sense. I can engage in this important aspect of practical reasoning without needing to work out in advance, or give a precise weighting to, how much time I spend in the garden as opposed to watching football. I think Davenport, too, acknowledges this when he says that ‘the synchronic dimension of essential coherence among our identity-constituting cares is compatible with a certain amount of diachronic disunity in our instrumental planning and
follow-through’ (2012: 113). Insofar as they both more explicitly acknowledge the importance of welcoming a plurality of goods into our lives (Rudd 2012: 215-7), and that a degree of ‘existential risk’ is necessary and desirable in the well-lived life, the gap between Davenport and Rudd, and Quinn and myself, on this point now seems negligible.

In this context, Davenport replies to narratosceptic worries about self-deception by stressing that authentic caring requires honesty with oneself, and a ‘rational commitment to avoid self-deceptive stories about one’s practical identity’ (2012: 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’ (2012: 118). Though again, he concedes that ‘maybe no one avoids …. completely’ (ibid.) self-deceptive illusions about their motives.

4. Beyond wholeheartedness: lessons from the Rat Man

Notwithstanding the differences between Frankfurt and Davenport sketched above, I would argue that any account derived from Frankfurtian wholeheartedness would do well to take on board David Velleman’s critique thereof. This highlights the need for a richer terminological landscape than Frankfurt offers us (and to which Davenport still seems committed). At the very least, we need to make space for a kind of ‘wholeheartedness’ that includes attitudes more naturally described as ambivalence, and the oddness of such a description shows the need to get beyond this terminology. I’ll try to make this case by connecting Velleman’s discussion of Freud’s ‘Rat Man’ with some recent discussions of forgiveness.

5 That said, Davenport’s important warning (2012: 120) about not confusing Quinn’s valorisation of listening to plural internal ‘voices’ with the rationalising of insincerity that C. S. Lewis warns against in The Screwtape Letters is well-taken.
The Rat Man is the chief protagonist of one of Freud’s most fascinating case histories. The main features of his disorder ‘were fears that something might happen to two people of whom he was very fond – his father and a young lady whom he admired’ (1955: 158). Early in his treatment he reported to Freud a conversation with a sadistic army colleague about a horrific punishment in which a pot of rats was placed on the victim’s buttocks and allowed to bore their way into his anus. When told of this, Freud’s patient instantly formed the idea (interpreted by Freud as a repressed wish) ‘that this was happening to a person who was very dear’ to him (1955: 167). In fact, two such people: the young woman and - it later emerged - his father.

Freud’s diagnosis of the Rat Man’s problem is a ‘splitting of the personality’ resulting from ‘a battle between love and hate raging in [his] breast’ (1955: 191) with respect to both his father and the woman. He both loved and hated them, but rather than experience these emotions as mixed, he repressed the hatred, dividing himself into both consciously loving and unconsciously hating selves. This, for Freud, explains his symptoms, such as his repeatedly doing and undoing an action (such as the removal and subsequent replacement of a stone from a road down which the woman’s carriage would travel (1955: 190)). Velleman suggests that although it looks at first as if ambivalence is the problem, a closer look reveals that the problem was ‘not so much ambivalence as his response to it’; that is, ‘by repressing his hatred and acknowledging only his love’ (2006: 343).

What matters for our purposes is that ‘The Rat Man’s repression ... consisted in a concerted practice of self-misinterpretation’ (ibid.) For instance, euphemistically describing his regular thoughts of harm befalling his father as mere ‘trains of thought’ (1955: 178) rather than hostile wishes, or displacing his hostile feelings towards his father on to himself or his
analyst. This misinterpretation is motivated by ‘the desire to dissociate himself from his own hatred and hostility’ (2006: 344).

Velleman claims that the Rat Man suffered ‘not from the disease of ambivalence but from something like Frankfurt’s cure. What made him ill was his effort to dissociate himself from one of his emotions, which is just what Frankfurt prescribes for cases of ambivalence’ (ibid., my emphasis). In his reply, Frankfurt denies this, claiming that the Rat Man’s problem is that ‘he became ill because he tried to achieve dissociation through repression’ (2002: 126), and that Frankfurt’s own prescription – ‘taking a decisive stand against certain feelings’ (ibid.) - is wholly different. Frankfurt insists that ambivalence as he uses the term involves not just mixed feelings but a divided will. The Rat Man should have resolved which side he is on: ‘come to stand decisively against the hatred and behind the love’ (ibid.)

But is there really so great a difference here? Velleman explicitly acknowledged that for Frankfurt a person can be wholehearted while retaining conflicting desires, so long as he has decisively identified with one and dissociated himself from the other. Yet he also notes just how strongly Frankfurt expresses this: the process of becoming wholehearted ‘involves a radical separation of the competing desires, one of which is not merely assigned a relatively less favoured position but extruded entirely as an outlaw’ (1988: 170). Such phraseology makes it difficult to see the difference between Frankfurt’s recommendation and repression.

---

6 Relatedly, Frankfurt claims elsewhere: ‘Wholeheartedness does not require that a person be altogether untroubled by inner opposition to his will. It just requires that, with respect to any such conflict, he himself be fully resolved ... he must be resolutely on the side of one of the forces struggling within him and not on the side of any other’ (1999: 100).
A full justification of this claim would take us too far into Freudian territory: is Frankfurttian expulsion from the self ‘the ultimate aim of repression’ (2006: 345n48)? But Velleman’s commonsensical story alone convinces me that the distinction between wholeheartedness and repression is far less clear than Frankfurt would have us believe. Velleman makes three important claims. First, that people typically have feelings of love for their parents mixed with feelings of, if not hatred, then residual hostility. Second, a piece of folk wisdom about dealing with mixed emotions: when angry with someone we love, ‘the first step towards dealing with our anger is to let it mingle with, and be modified by, our other emotions toward the same person. Isolating our hostility from our other feelings is a way of not dealing with it, of allowing it to remain undigested, a lasting source of inner strife and outer impulsiveness’ (2006: 346, my emphasis). Yet – third – it is so daunting to allow these emotions to mingle with each other that we often seek alternative strategies:

‘The Rat Man chose to regard his hatred as foreign because he was afraid of letting it into his emotional life, even though doing so was his only chance of domesticating it. All of us are like the Rat Man at least to this extent, that we feel threatened by various emotions that would introduce conflict into our lives. We consequently wish that our commitments were not tinged with regret, that our projects were not fraught with doubts, that our loves were not complicated by hate. We wish ... we could be wholehearted.’ (ibid., my emphasis)

But Velleman doubts this wish is ‘healthy’, insofar as we may simply be aiming to defend ourselves against our own emotions: ‘Hence our affinity for Frankfurt’s ideal may not indicate that he’s right about the constitution of the self; it may indicate no more than our own defensiveness’ (ibid.) Sympathetic to this, I stick with my earlier view that the kind of willingness to live with a degree of paradox can be a better option. This dovetails with Marya Schechtman’s objection – which I still endorse – that ‘the work of shaping a life is less of a
task of micro-management’ than Frankfurt implies, and that it is ‘less about directly settling conflicts than about establishing safe boundaries within which these conflicts can be allowed to play themselves out’ (2004: 426). I’m not sure whether, in his new position, Davenport agrees with this or not. But as regards Kierkegaard, it seems clear that a willingness to live with a degree of paradox and creative tension has at least as much claim to be considered ‘Kierkegaardian’ as does a picture that places perhaps too great a reliance on *Purity of Heart*. Though in fact, I shall suggest later how the Rat Man can actually pass the ‘purity of heart’ test.

In his discussion of proper self-love in *The Reasons of Love*, Frankfurt again insists that the ambivalent person cannot decide ‘once and for all’ which side of his competing desires he is on, and so remains ‘volitionally fragmented’ (2004: 92). This ambivalence allegedly thwarts proper self-love, since there is ‘no final unequivocal truth, no straightforward fact of the matter’ (2004: 93) concerning whether or not, say, Søren really loves Regine. Consequently, Søren ‘is as radically ambivalent concerning *himself* in this matter as he is concerning her’ (ibid.) But Frankfurt’s insistence on a ‘once and for all’ decision seems untrue to the complexity of matters of love – and life.\(^7\) And it’s curiously at odds with a footnote in which he seems to recognise a version of this worry. Frankfurt says: ‘being wholehearted does not entail having a closed mind. The wholehearted person need not be a fanatic. Someone who knows without qualification where he stands may nonetheless be quite ready to *give serious attention* to reasons for changing that stand. There is a difference between being confident and being stubborn or obtuse’ (2004: 95). While a welcome recognition of the complexity of life, this leaves plenty unclear. What, if anything, would lead someone from giving the

\(^7\) This ‘once and for all’ stipulation is precisely what sponsored the ‘moral blindness’ worry I raised in Lippitt 2007.
alternative stance ‘serious attention’ to actually changing his mind? Would such a person still count as ‘wholehearted’? If so, what would justify that description? For if he does change his stance, then clearly his decision wasn’t ‘once and for all’.

Interestingly, Rudd seems some distance from Frankfurt on this point. First, in a response to Nussbaum’s claim that the ethical life requires flexibility and openness to unimagined possibilities (part of the ‘moral blindness’ worry), Rudd agrees, responding that it is a common mistake ‘to think that narrative theories require us to map out a detailed plot for our lives in advance and then grimly stick to that, forcing whatever events happen to occur into that pre-conceived framework. On the contrary, in narrating our own lives, we are making up our stories as we go along, weaving the contingencies of life into a design that keeps changing in previously unpredictable ways as we do so’ (2012: 217). So much the better for narrative theories. But we are some considerable distance here from Frankfurt’s ‘once and for all’ stipulation. What Rudd is saying is that we should resist ‘wholeheartedness’ thus understood.

Indeed, in his final chapter, Rudd gives an account that I think amounts to what a narrativist should say on this point. At the outset, Rudd acknowledges the self-deception objection: that any ‘realistic’ account of the self and its orientation to the Good (the main theme of his book) must ‘take account of our tendencies to self-deception and fantasy, our pervasive failures of self-knowledge’(2012: 228). For this reason, he goes on to explore the importance of the unconscious for the project of balancing ‘self-shaping’ with ‘self-acceptance’. One kind of ‘bad’ story one might tell about oneself - and thus on Rudd’s account a ‘failure of self-knowledge’ - is one where although none of the facts are falsified, the story ‘fail[s] to make the connections that would make true sense of one’s life; and may instead make connections
that obscure that sense’ (2012: 232). This, I suggest, serves as a good description of the Rat Man, or anyone who, faced with two conflicting feelings both of which are significant for self-understanding, takes Frankfurt’s advice and identifies with one feeling, ‘extruding as an outlaw’ the other. Such a person is precisely failing to make connections that would make ‘true sense’ of his life. Rudd is rightly troubled by accounts of the unconscious wherein the purpose of psychotherapy is simply to bring to the surface repressed feelings so that, aware of them, we might better control them. This ‘makes it sound as though one’s unconscious is an alien being dragging one around despite oneself’: a ‘dangerous misunderstanding’ (2012: 236). Rather, inspired by Jung, Rudd suggests that instead of identifying myself with a conscious ego, ‘the ego needs to learn from the unconscious, not just about it’; or ‘the ego may need to let itself be shaped by the unconscious, rather than just learning how to shape it’ (2012: 239). Frankfurt’s advice to stand ‘decisively against the hatred and behind the love’ is prone to the charge that the I with which such a person identifies is ‘stunted’ and needs ‘to grow and change, by opening itself up to what it had deformed by excluding’ (2012: 236).

Rudd’s discussion of Schechtman’s example of the Fifties Wife - whose higher order will identifies with her role as housewife and mother, but who is haunted by her repressed desires for higher education and career - offers an interesting parallel to the Rat Man. I find Rudd’s advice greatly superior to Frankfurt’s. If the Fifties Wife finds herself haunted by fantasies of setting fire to the house, poisoning her husband’s food or thrashing the children, the point ‘is not that she should act on these fantasies, but that she should take them seriously as symptoms, see them as telling her that she is experiencing her life as intolerably narrow and oppressive’ (2012: 247). What she should do about it is a matter for ‘conscious and self-

---

8 Compare here Rudd’s criticism of Freud’s remarks on Goethe’s Faust: Frankfurt’s advice looks to me like another instance of ‘the hubristic ego, attempting to impose its own narrow vision of order on what it may too quickly dismiss as mere chaos’ (2012: 238).
critical exploration’, not simply a matter of standing firm in favour of her higher order commitments. She needs somehow to ‘take in what she has repressed, though in a form which enables it to be integrated with a less one-sided version of what she finds of real value in her family life’ (ibid.). This is a good example of what Rudd describes as ‘the need for a delicate balance between the need to recognise and accept our natures as having their own stubborn realities; and the need to take active responsibility for their shaping’ (2012: 244).

Similarly, imagine a version of the Rat Man whose aggressive fantasies against his father are a frustrated way of expressing his unconscious resentment of his father’s controlling nature. The challenge for him is how to recognise this honestly; take it up into his sense of self; and work to recognise what in these feelings of hatred is good (the desire for greater independence of his father?). In such a case, we could agree with Rudd’s verdict on the Fifties Wife: that the basic reason why she should integrate her conflicting desires is ‘not just that she will feel unhappy if she doesn’t, but that she will be leading an objectively worse life if she fails to do so’ (2012: 248).

Perhaps a defender of ‘wholeheartedness’ might insist that there is still a sense here in which something with that name can play a role as a regulative ideal. But insofar as this is true, we have gone so far beyond Frankfurt’s use of the term, that I can see no real merit in retaining it.9 Moreover, I believe that the proper role of successful psychotherapy here is to lead a person from feeling unmanageably torn to feeling manageably torn: still, perhaps, a kind of ‘ambivalence’. I wonder whether Rudd’s greater openness to psychoanalytic insights might partially explain why ‘wholeheartedness’ appears nowhere in his index, whereas it still plays

9 Rudd certainly sees Jungian integration as an important complement to the ethical understanding of the self he seeks to develop, and views this integration as an ethical or evaluative goal (2012: 245). But for the reasons sketched above, I think it would be misleading to describe such integration as a quest for Frankfurt-inspired ‘wholeheartedness’.
a central role in Davenport’s account. If Davenport agrees with the views I have drawn on Rudd to express above, I suggest that he would be better off abandoning the term.

Earlier I suggested that the ‘Kierkegaardian’ accounts that Davenport and Rudd have each offered may be putting too great an emphasis on Purity of Heart. Without resiling from that view, I want now to suggest that even if one did make the concerns of that discourse central, the Freud-Velleman advice to the Rat Man (as opposed to Frankfurt’s) can still be judged as ‘willing the good in truth’. Note that this parallels Velleman’s claim that while at first it looks as if the Rat Man’s problem is ambivalence, the problem is in fact his response to it. Fully acknowledging his feelings as a mixture of love and hatred (and working through them – but without prejudging the destination of that process) at first looks like ambivalence, but in fact amounts to ‘willing the good in truth’. It is crucial to see that such an attitude to his mixed feelings is not an instance of the ‘doublemindedness’ Kierkegaard condemns. The Rat Man would not be ‘will[ing] the good only to a certain degree’ (UDVS, 64/SKS 8, 172). On the contrary, the Rat Man who moves from being unmanageably to manageably torn between his mixed feelings can be said to be fully ‘willing the good in truth’. Recognising his ambivalence towards his father cannot accurately be described as willing the good partially along with something else, as it is not a question of ‘love good; hate bad’. Rather, he is relating to the situation truthfully. By contrast, failing to address his mixed feelings in this

---

10 Rudd does mention ‘wholeheartedness’ en passant (2012: 46, 105), but it is not a central element of his account.

11 I do not have space to explore this here, but in judging what is ‘Kierkegaardian’, suppose instead we took our measure from Kierkegaard’s three late discourses on the lily and the bird (WA, 1-45/SKS, 117-48). What is commended there – to take joy in ‘today’ and to view as irrelevant ‘tomorrow’ or ‘the day after tomorrow’ (WA, 38/SKS 11, 42) – seems to leave little room for a focus on narrative unity.

12 I take it that this is the only kind of doublemindedness discussed by Kierkegaard of which the Rat Man could plausibly be accused. He is clearly not willing the good for the sake of reward (UDVS, 37ff./SKS 8, 149ff.), out of fear of punishment (UDVS, 44ff./SKS 8, 156ff.) or out of self-wilfulness (UDVS, 60ff./SKS 8, 169ff.).
way would be a version of the ‘evasion’ that Kierkegaard condemns (UDVS, 82/SKS 8, 188). Just willing the love, while excluding (repressing?) the hate, would not be ‘willing the good in truth’.

In light of all this, I still think that ‘wholeheartedness’, even as a regulative ideal, is a term apt to mislead. In further support of this, I want now to turn to a brief discussion of the capacity for forgiveness, a central theme in Kierkegaard’s thought (see Lippitt 2013a: 156-180). I shall argue that the grammar of forgiveness raises further doubts about ‘wholeheartedness’.

In Frankfurt’s classic example of drug addiction, the addict who is trying to kick the habit can label the competing desire as an ‘it’, ‘the addiction’, alien from himself. But in the case of forgiveness, the recommended radicality – ‘extruding as an outlaw’ – is just as inappropriate as in the Rat Man case. I’ll argue that built into the very nature of an important variety of forgiveness – both of others and oneself – is an important attitude that a ‘wholeheartedness’ account cannot readily accommodate.

5. Beyond wholeheartedness: lessons from forgiveness and self-forgiveness

Consider first the case of forgiveness of others. Christopher Bennett has distinguished between two metaphors for forgiveness: ‘wiping the slate clean’ and ‘turning the other cheek’. As well as ‘redemptive’ forgiveness - which can be warranted by a wrongdoer doing enough (through apology; contrition; making amends) to ‘wipe the slate clean’ - Bennett points to ‘personal’ forgiveness which depends more upon forgiver than wrongdoer. This can be granted without the wrongdoer’s prior repentance, sometimes in the hope of inspiring it.

13 In some psychotherapeutic addiction treatments, clients are explicitly encouraged to do so.
Such ‘turning the other cheek’ ‘involves having sufficient [moral] confidence in your own status ... that you are prepared to make yourself vulnerable to further insult in order to reach out to the wrongdoer in some way – for instance in the hope of encouraging his return to the moral community’ (2003: 139). But such forgiveness does not imply that the slate has been ‘wiped clean’, and can be offered in such a manner as ‘to make it clear that I do not regard [the wrongdoer] as vindicated or excused’: the relationship re-established is ‘tentative’, even ‘mistrustful’ (2003: 141). (Consider the case of forgiving a spouse their adultery.) The important point is that there can be a kind of forgiveness that continues to incorporate blame. It is possible to ‘put the wrong behind you’ without accepting that the slate has been wiped clean, as if the wrong had never occurred. We need such a conception of forgiveness to address the valid concern that it is possible to forgive too easily. (The endlessly betrayed spouse who always readily forgives their partner’s adultery strikes us as lacking proper self-respect.)

The wholeheartedness/ambivalence distinction will not do justice to such cases. If forced to describe such a situation using one of these terms, ambivalence would be the better option, as these will be cases about which we are likely to have recurrent doubts.

An analogous situation holds in the case of self-forgiveness. Akin to Bennett’s forgiveness that retains blame, Robin Dillon has independently argued that we need to allow for a kind of self-forgiveness that retains room for continuing self-reproach. Here we need to hold together two thoughts. The first is the undesirability of constant self-laceration for the sake of it. Yet the second is that, just as we worry about the lack of self-respect of the person who repeatedly grants forgiveness too easily, so are we even more suspicious of the person who forgives himself with excessive ease. Such letting myself off the moral hook is not just
weakness of will, but a violation of moral integrity. As Dillon argues, self-condemnatory attitudes ‘express one’s judgement, in light of standards that are important to one’s moral self-identity, that some central aspect of oneself is reprehensible’. One cannot overcome those attitudes without renouncing the judgment and the standards on which they are based. And ‘when those standards are central to one’s normative self-identity ... renouncing them would be a failure to respect oneself and a sacrifice of moral integrity, which would give one additional grounds for self-condemnation’ (2001: 57-8).

Yet Dillon argues that holding ‘a complex view of oneself that is shot through with ambivalence’ is perfectly consistent with forgiving oneself. This is because:

‘Self-forgiveness does not require extinguishing all self-reproach, for it is not really about the presence or absence of negative feelings and judgments; it’s about their power. Forgiving oneself means not that one no longer experiences self-reproach but that one is no longer in bondage to it, no longer controlled or crippled by a negative conception of oneself and the debilitating pain of it, no longer alienated from oneself, so that one can now live well enough. This is possible even if one retains a measure of clear-sighted self-reproach, overcoming it without eliminating it.’ (2001: 83, my emphases)14

This parallels Velleman’s recommendation to the Rat Man. Frankfurt’s reply would probably be that this is not enough to count as ambivalent in his sense: our self-forgiver’s will would have to be divided, and provided he has resolved ‘once and for all’ to forgive himself, then he counts as wholehearted. But what sense can be made of such a ‘once and for all’ resolution in

14 I have argued that a closely related view can be found in Kierkegaard (Lippitt 2013).
a concrete case like this? For those doubts that I will feel, in any actual such case of self-forgiveness conceived as a difficult moral task, are in significant part doubts about whether my (higher order) will to forgive myself is warranted. Thus the options seem to be, first, a case where my iron will to forgive myself comes down ruthlessly on any moments of self-doubt, which are judged as weaknesses, and ‘extruded as outlaws’. Or, second, where the will is in some sense divided (that is, where I sometimes doubt my higher order resolution to forgive myself). The latter sounds truer to genuine cases of self-forgiveness as a moral task. But such an internally torn will does not have to be debilitating. Dillon’s description is apt: ‘it is not really about the presence or absence of negative feelings and judgments; it’s about their power’. The first option – the iron will trampling self-doubt - sounds like the attitude that was so damaging to the Rat Man. In short, what I am claiming is that ‘wholeheartedness’ is quite the wrong term to describe the ‘managably torn’ nature most of us feel in such cases of forgiveness and self-forgiveness. ‘Ambivalent’ would be a better term (presumably why Dillon - like Freud’s translator before her (1955: 239) - picks it). The point is that in such cases – unlike that of Frankfurt’s addict - in forgiving myself, I must continue to view that ‘inner opposition to the will’ – to continue to blame myself - as mine, as part of me. If I don’t, then for Dillon’s reasons, I let myself down qua moral agent.

This leaves Davenport with the following question. Is there room for this kind of ambivalence within his new variety of wholeheartedness? Some of his account suggests so. But then doesn’t this suggest that the descriptors simply can’t do justice to the complexity of the landscape, and that what we need is a richer terminological toolkit? The real task, I

---

15 This is not at all the same thing as ‘only partially repent[ing] of some error’ (Davenport 2012: 112). I trust I have said enough above to show why being manageably torn should not be conflated with being ‘halfhearted’ or ‘doubleminded’ in an ethically culpable sense.

16 See especially his recognition of the importance of ‘infinite resignation’ (2012: 145-9).
suspect, is to work out what forms of ambivalence really are a threat to our ‘existential coherence’, and which we need actively to embrace.

6. Goldie on self-forgiveness

In his recent, posthumously published book, the leading narrativist Peter Goldie has explicitly discussed self-forgiveness, arguing that a narrative sense of self is precisely what we need to understand why self-forgiveness is valuable. I have no problem with much of what Goldie has to say about ‘the narrative sense of self’, but though his discussion of self-forgiveness is illuminating, it is interesting that he elides precisely the problem I drew upon Velleman and Dillon above to highlight.

For Goldie, self-forgiveness is one way in which we apply ‘narrative thinking’ about our future (such as ‘planning, forming policies, and making resolutions’ (2012: x)). Goldie’s discussion of self-forgiveness is strongly influenced by Charles Griswold, who holds that self-forgiveness is possible, but that it falls short of paradigmatic forgiveness (2007: 113). For Goldie, the central difficulty that self-forgiveness faces is that paradigmatic forgiveness is dyadic; a moral relation between two people. He argues that the solution to this difficulty ‘lies in the narrative sense of self, and in the way in which one can think of oneself as another’ (2012: 102). Narrative thinking about my past is dyadic in the sense that it involves me now thinking about me then (2012: 106). Looking back on an occasion in which I have made a cruel joke behind a friend’s back (Goldie’s example), me now views myself as a

---

17 Goldie distinguishes between a ‘narrative sense of self’ and a ‘sense of a narrative self’ (2012: x, 117-149), arguing that there is no interesting form of the latter. In this sense, his position – metaphysically neutral about personal identity (2012: 125-7) - is distinct from Schechtman (whom he explicitly criticises), Davenport and Rudd.

18 Not that this means there are literally two people: self-forgiveness would be impossible were me now not the same person as me then.
character in a narrative, in which I now judge as boastful and disloyal what struck me then as witty and sophisticated. As a result of this, I experience remorse. In such a circumstance, the first four of Griswold’s conditions for forgiveness are met: we have an offence against another for which I judge myself responsible; reactive (negative) emotions thereto; a narrative account of what I did, and why, which makes my actions intelligible; and contrition for the wrong. When we turn from thinking about the past to thinking about the future, Goldie argues, we see that the fifth condition is also met: commitment for change (and taking serious steps to live up to this commitment). Thus:

‘Engaging in narrative thinking of myself in the future, imagining myself acting on the self-governing policies that I have now adopted because of my regrets for what I did in the past, I can now conceive of myself in future episodes, acting as I now know I should. And I now feel, external to the narrative, emotions that express my satisfaction, through strong reflective endorsement, with my self-governing policies. In the long run, my aim is that these policies will become embedded in my character and personality traits, so that the policies no longer need to be conscious, explicit parts of my self-governance. By then my commitment for change will have been fully met’ (2012: 108).

At this point, all the conditions allowing self-forgiveness are in place. I may continue to have reactive negative emotions when I recall my misdeed, ‘but meeting the conditions of self-forgiveness means that one need no longer have continuing reactive attitudes towards one’s continuing self, such as shame, self-contempt and self-loathing’ (ibid.)

Our earlier discussion has put us in a position to see what is right, and what potentially problematic, in this description. Prima facie, what Goldie is commending sounds consistent with wholeheartedness. But what is the status of the continuing reactive attitudes towards oneself? Goldie is right that we don’t want a debilitating remorse or self-reproach. This
undesirable result is perhaps most likely brought about by an attitude of globalised self-condemnation (‘I’m vicious, good-for-nothing scum!’). But as Goldie also acknowledges, it does not follow from this that there is no room for me now to continue to see me then as blameworthy, and to experience the appropriate emotions about this. And the fact that me now and me then are the same person makes this something other than third person observation: it makes all of shame, remorse - and self-forgiveness - both possible and (in the right circumstances) appropriate.

But Goldie’s account will be incomplete unless we add to it our important earlier emphasis: that me now’s continuing to blame me then is an important dimension of responsible self-forgiveness. Goldie’s way of putting this risks making it sound as if my continued negative emotions when I recall my misdeed are a regrettable remnant of reflection on the past that I haven’t – yet – quite been able to shake off (2012: 147). (Recall Rudd’s criticism of Freud on a related point.) But in fact, such a reaction – of continued ‘ambivalence’? – is a crucial part of what distinguishes responsible from irresponsible self-forgiveness.

And finally, note that this ‘pro-ambivalence’ view appears to be Kierkegaard’s. The importance of self-forgiveness to which Kierkegaard is fervently committed is no easy matter in which the slate is wiped clean as if no wrong had been committed. In precisely the discourse on which Davenport and Rudd set such store, Kierkegaard stresses the importance of repentance as ‘a quiet daily concern’ (UDVS, 18/SKS 8, 133). This supports the idea that self-forgiveness is for him not a one-off - he is sternly critical of ‘momentary repentance’ (UDVS, 17/SKS 8, 132) - but rather more like the process we drew on Dillon to describe. He insists that one’s guilt should not be totally forgotten. On the contrary, ‘it is a gain to gain inwardness to regret the guilt more and more fervently … Of repentance it must be said that, if it is forgotten, then its strength was nothing but immaturity, but the longer and more deeply it is preserved, the better it becomes. The more closely one views guilt, the more appalling it
looks, but *repentance is most pleasing to God the farther away on the path of good it catches a glimpse of the guilt*’ (UDVS, 18-19/SKS 8, 133-4, my emphases).

If the argument above is sound, then what pleases God is something very different from ‘wholeheartedness’.