

This section welcomes submissions addressing literature as a means to explore ethical issues arising in healthcare. “Literature” is understood broadly, including fiction and creative nonfiction, illness narratives, drama, and poetry; film studies might be considered if the films are adaptations from a literary work. Topics include in-depth analysis of literary works as well as theoretical contributions, discussions, and commentary about narrative approaches to disease and medicine, the way literature shapes the relationship between patients and healthcare professionals, the role of speculative fiction as a testing ground for future scenarios in healthcare, and so on. Articles discussing the uses of literature for bioethics education and outreach will be particularly appreciated. Research on literature not originally written in English will be considered as long as it has also been published in translation. Submissions should include an abstract and should conform to the CQ Guidelines for Contributors. To submit an article or discuss a suitable topic, write to Antonio Casado da Rocha at antonio.casado@ehu.es.

## *Narrative Ethics, Authentic Integrity, and an Intrapersonal Medical Encounter in David Foster Wallace’s “Luckily the Account Representative Knew CPR”*

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**Abstract:** In Wallace’s short story “Luckily the Account Representative Knew CPR,” a vice president (VP) suffers cardiac arrest. As an account representative (AR) administers CPR, he discovers his own impersonality mirrored back to him by the VP—a disturbing vision of himself that the AR wishes to escape. Because modern moral theories would have the AR respond impersonally to the VP, those theories would only exacerbate his existential predicament. In contrast, by regarding the AR’s act as one that he, in particular, should perform, narrative ethics can discern a resolution for his predicament: because the AR still values his diminished capacities for care and spontaneity, this situation offers him an opportunity to revive those former traits. Doing so would give him greater *authentic integrity*, or narrative continuity with the most important aspects of his past. Authentic integrity can serve narrative ethics as a helpful starting point for understanding how the life stories of patients, clinicians, and others might appropriately unfold.

**Keywords:** narrative ethics; authenticity; integrity; authentic integrity; David Foster Wallace

David Foster Wallace is best known for his sharp-eyed and whimsical non-fiction, three novels—especially his 1996 masterpiece, *Infinite Jest*—and his

prolonged struggles with depression, which ended in suicide in 2008. As critics—understandably—attend to Wallace’s novels and longer stories,

many of his shorter works remain underappreciated. "Luckily the Account Representative Knew CPR" is a good example. This piece appeared in 1989 in Wallace's first collection, *Girl with Curious Hair*. It is the story of an account representative's troubling encounter with an older colleague who suffers cardiac arrest. As the younger man performs CPR on the senior executive, the older man becomes like a mirror in which the younger man is forced to face his present impersonality and the prospect of a pallid, corporately constricted future.

I want to argue that, unlike modern ethical theories, narrative ethics can understand the Account Representative's attempt to aid his coworker as a *personal* act, or one that it makes sense for him, in particular, to perform, in that it could bring greater integrity to his self-narrative. I refer to the title character as the AR and to his ailing colleague, the Vice President, as the VP. Neither the AR nor the VP is ever named. Echoing that anonymity, their building, the company for which they work, and the surrounding city also remain nameless. This impersonal depiction of characters and setting serves to reinforce the story's intrapersonal encounter. As the AR rushes to aid his older colleague, the younger man glimpses his own impersonality in the VP—a disturbing vision of himself that the AR dimly wishes to escape. Here, the story bears a layer of moral irony, for modern ethical theories such as deontology and utilitarianism would have the AR respond impersonally to the VP. That is, according to such theories, the AR should do for the VP what anyone else, anywhere, should do for another who is in such a plight. But for the AR, such a response would be untenable, for it is impersonality that has rendered his life so smothering. In other words, modern moral theories cannot appreciate what would, *from the*

*AR's perspective*, make his response to the VP morally right. For the AR, attempting impersonally to save this man in whom he sees himself would be like putting his own skeletal and dubious existence on life support.

Clearly, that will not do. But is any other lifeline available to the AR? Luckily, he knows CPR, a skill he learned from the woman who became his wife and from whom he is now estranged. As he administers CPR, the AR briefly recalls his life with her, a part of his past during which he was more spontaneous and more open to intimacy with others. These memories suggest that he hopes, somehow, to resuscitate those traits in himself. Though the AR might not realize it, the impulsive and intimate nature of his response to the VP presents him with precisely that opportunity for recovery. As the narrator puts it in the story's final sentence, the AR is "bent to what two lives required" as he struggles to resuscitate the VP.<sup>1</sup> By responding to the VP as he does, the AR has a chance to revive what, for him, seems to be an important but diminished part of himself—his more caring and uncalculating capacities. In short, given what we know of the AR's past and its relationship to this encounter, narrative ethics can regard the AR's response to the VP as one that could bring more *authentic integrity* to his life story. Authentic integrity is the narrative unity that a person and his life story achieve when he is faithful to those aspects of his past that he regards as most important. So, in sharp contrast with modern moral theories, narrative ethics is well positioned to appreciate what, from the AR's point of view, would make his response to the VP morally right.

However, at the story's end, the AR remains in moral limbo. Just as the VP is still in full arrest, it is unclear whether the AR will emerge from this crisis any

more unified than he entered it. In that way, this breathless story presses an important question: how might clinicians respond and move forward when their patients' experiences disturb them by reminding them of their own fragmented narratives? When their doing so is in line with the most appropriate care for their patients, clinicians might respond in ways that bring greater authentic integrity to their own life stories, healing themselves.

### An Impersonal and Intrapersonal Encounter

As the story's third-person narrator introduces the AR and the VP, it is their similarities that are highlighted. It is night, well past ten o'clock, and each man finds himself at the tired and tie-loosened end of another workday. As "young for an executive" and "newly divorced," the AR seems to stand in contrast with the seasoned VP, who has been "married for almost thirty years" (pp. 45–6). But the narrator also reports that "there were between these last two executives to leave the Building the sorts of similarities enjoyed by parallel lines" (p. 45). The men work at opposite ends of different floors, and as they walk to the "open-mouthed" elevators that will bear them down parallel shafts into the Building's substructure, they carry identical briefcases, move through similar spaces, feel the same "special subsonic disquiet," and receive a similar "intuition of the askew" (p. 45). They work for the same company, but they know each other "only slightly, and only by sight" (p. 47). Later, we learn that they also "shared pain, though of course neither knew" (p. 48).<sup>2</sup> Spatially and experientially, these men mirror each other.

That mirroring continues in relationship to their impersonality. Like the separate elevators that deliver them to

opposite ends of the underground parking garage, these executives are at different ends of their anonymous careers. Referenced only by their job titles, neither man is ever named. As "the Account Representative," it is as if the AR were no more than a nameless stand-in for one of his firm's vital functions. As undistinguished as a respirator, he keeps cash flowing through the corporate body. Similarly, the VP's full title—"Vice President in Charge of Overseas Production"—suggests his own estrangement from his product, whatever it might be (p. 45). As the two enter "the Executive Garage"—"the Building's deepest plane" that "seemed very distant from everything else"—the setting itself alludes to the compression that each man suffers: "The empty Executive Garage was enormous, broad, long, its ceiling a claustrophobic eight-and-a-quarter feet, its (barely) overhead lights harshly yellow, its surfaces' cement the tired color of much exhaust" (p. 46). In this space, the noises the men make produce only "echoes and echoes of echoes" (p. 46).

Furthermore, when considered alongside their different ranks within the company and their shared evening labors, the contrast between their bodies and modes of transportation suggests that the AR is on course to grow into a position like the VP's—as a younger man staring into a mirror might imagine the older man that he will become. Whereas the AR is "spare, lithe" and has "about him an air of extreme economy," the VP is a tall and large man, "broad and blunt, his back a slow-moving hull in Production's daytime hallways" (pp. 46–7). Analogously, the AR drives a "clean-white motor scooter" that leans on its kickstand beside the VP's "solid and equally clean broad Brougham of a car" (p. 47). As empty as the AR already is, all signs point to a more imposing vacancy that awaits him.

The AR's impersonality is also apparent in his thoughts and manner as the VP approaches across the empty parking garage. The AR is anticipating "the obligation of conversation without the conversational prerequisites of intimacy or interests or concerns to share" (p. 48). By this point, we already know that the AR oscillates in his work between "smoothly capable" and "cold" (p. 46). He is also "most at ease with those he countenanced at a distance of several feet" (p. 46). Now, as the VP walks toward him, the AR composes "a carefully casual face" and chooses a greeting that, "neither dismissive nor inviting," will contain "an acknowledgement of distance and an easy willingness to preserve same" (p. 48).

But something is amiss. The AR notices that the VP has stopped, grimaced, "dropped a noisily slender briefcase, and placed both hands over a vague concavity that seemed, a bit blurrily, to have appeared in the double-breasted front of his topcoat. He grabbed at himself as do those in pain" (p. 49). The Account Representative then watches as the VP "raked a raw clean streak in a cement pillar's soot and clipped a WRONG WAY sign's weighted concrete doughnut with a roundabout heel as he pirouetted, reached out at air, hunched, crumpled, and fell" (p. 49). Wrong way indeed—here is a warning that the AR might yet heed.

"Luckily the Account Representative knew CPR" (p. 49). "In a samaritan shot," he traverses "the stony yardage" between himself and the VP and straddles "the writhing huge blunt older man, who was, at this new close emergency range, now revealed" to the AR "to have large facial pores, blankly kind eyes, and a delicate capillary web of red in his jowls, his mouth fishily agape, forehead toad-white and sickly sour, chin lost in a pool of his own throat's meat" (p. 50). "From the moment the pillar

and sign were streaked and clipped," the AR "had been shouting for help in the empty Executive Garage," but his cries do not reach beyond the building's lowest level, where the AR is "positively *having at*" the VP's "defective heart" and supplying him "with infusions of breath" (pp. 50–1). As he gives CPR, the AR briefly pauses several times to cry "help" into the echoing and untenanted night. Because it is the story's only spoken word, the AR's "help" bears a heightened significance—as if the AR, having dimly glimpsed himself in his imperiled colleague, were also calling out for his own rescue.<sup>3</sup> Earlier, the text suggested that, like the "ownership" of the empty Building, the AR's identity is also "truly an issue, hung in air, unsettled"—like a question posed but as yet unanswered (p. 46). Now that the AR has come face-to-face with his own fragility and grotesque impersonality, the question of his identity is more pressing than ever.

### Modern Moral Theories and the Limits of Impersonality

Given the preceding characterization of the Account Representative's practical and existential predicament, it is intriguing to consider the difference between an impersonal evaluation of his response to the VP and how the AR himself might assess that response. Whereas modern moral theories would consider the AR's situation from a detached, third-person perspective, narrative ethics, I argue, would assign priority to the AR's own view of this encounter. As a result, modern moral theories suffer a severe limitation: unlike narrative ethics, they cannot appreciate what would, *for the AR*, make his response to the VP morally right.

With the possible exception of the moral dilemmas to which they could lead, modern moral theories such as

deontology and utilitarianism are presumed to be universally applicable. That is, their proponents suppose that these theories can serve as dependable, ever-relevant bases for the moral analysis of an action, disclosing that action's status as morally wrong, permissible, or required. From a detached, impersonal vantage point, these theories would regard the AR's situation and conclude that he is morally required to try to save the VP. To see this, consider the deontological ethics of Immanuel Kant, according to which everyone has an imperfect duty of beneficence. This is a duty to render assistance to persons in need to the extent that one is able. This duty arises because others are, like oneself, rational agents whose happiness depends in part on the achievement of their goals. To care about one's own goals and happiness while ignoring those of others displays an incoherent bias, for rational agency is everywhere the same and always valuable. So, for Kant, the AR would be required to help the VP because, in this case, any other response would constitute an impermissible indifference to the VP as a rational agent. The VP's goals—whatever they happen to be—and his happiness hang in the balance. The AR must help.<sup>4</sup> Here, the AR and his colleague are divested of personality, in that each is regarded as a mere rational agent, and, conceptually speaking, they are interchangeable with any two similarly situated rational agents.

Or, were a hedonistic rule utilitarian to assess the AR's situation, the AR would be advised to follow whatever rule would tend to produce the greatest balance of happiness over suffering. In his present predicament, the AR should act in accordance with a rule that requires a lone bystander to provide assistance to the extent that he is able, for providing such assistance is the course of action most likely to facilitate

happiness and to prevent or relieve suffering for all concerned. Here, the value of happiness and the disvalue of suffering are thought of as *agent neutral*—that is, they are believed not to vary much from person to person. So, when seen from the detached perspective of this moral tradition, the AR and the VP are again limned impersonally, their relevant values and disvalues fungible with those of anyone else. The rule that the AR should follow in these circumstances is the one that anyone else in his situation should obey. From this third-person perspective, the AR fulfills what he is morally required to do when he tries to help the VP.

There is an important feature of the AR's situation that the theories discussed previously fail to appreciate: as we have seen, it is precisely impersonality that has rendered the AR's life so unbearably stifling. His workaday existence is as anonymous, vacant, and flat as the parking garage in which he encounters the VP. Just as that chilling structure is the Building's "deepest plane," the AR's troubles are likewise founded on his own impersonality (p. 46).<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, were the AR to ask himself what is the right thing to do in this situation, an impersonal, outsider's point of view is the last perspective from which he would want to supply an answer. By adopting that perspective, he would only further espouse the anonymity that is at the root of his atrophied existence. Instead, confronted with the horror of his own impersonality, the AR would seek to make sense of his predicament from his own vantage point—a task with which narrative ethics is well equipped to help. That is, were the AR to seek an explanation for the rightness of any particular course of action in this situation, that explanation would not be credible to him unless it told how one or another act would be personal, or why it makes sense for



him, in particular, to perform it. But what might such an explanation look like? As the AR runs to assist his fallen colleague, could he (and we) understand him as running toward a life that would be more . . . authentic?

### **The Account Representative, Narrative Ethics, and Authentic Integrity**

The field of narrative ethics is deeply indebted to the work of psychologist Jerome Bruner, who has written eloquently about ways in which the self is both narrator and narrated. In *Making Stories*, Bruner contends that “there is no such thing as an intuitively obvious and essential self to know,” for

we constantly construct and reconstruct our selves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future. Telling oneself about oneself is like making up a story about who and what we are, what’s happened, and why we’re doing what we’re doing.<sup>6</sup>

“Self-making is a narrative art,” Bruner observes.<sup>7</sup> That art involves—among much else—a balancing act between autonomy and commitment, between the conviction that “one has a will of one’s own, a certain freedom of choice, a degree of possibility,” and one’s sense of relatedness to others, such as friends, family, and institutions.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Bruner claims, when our self-narratives encounter a severe disruption—“you get cancer,” for example, or “your wife leaves you, or your accountant calls to say that . . . you have no money left”—we usually try to address the disruption with “stylistic integrity.”<sup>9</sup> We search for a way both to honor the person that we have been and to be true to the people we love and what they expect of us.<sup>10</sup> In such ways, we seek continuity over time.

Although it strikes me as thin to see the “self” as no more than the joined hands of narrator and narrative, Bruner’s account illuminates much about what it means for us to hold ourselves together. Whereas he refers to stylistic integrity, narrative ethicists speak similarly of a person’s narrative integrity, unity, or coherence. Narrative integrity is a narrative value, a value that we discover partly *within* our experience of narratives, or *as* we author and receive stories. As we receive stories (e.g., as readers, viewers, or listeners), we value a character that shows some degree of continuity, because such coherence allows us to form expectations of her, to anticipate others’ responses to her, and to place her within the story as a whole. As we read of a detective who approaches a case with care and insight, we expect him to evince those traits with each new case that he encounters. And as he does so, we read on confidently in our understanding of him. In similar ways, the continuity of our stories about ourselves aids our self-understanding, helping us to know what to expect of ourselves, to anticipate others’ responses to us, to locate ourselves within other stories, and the like. Of course, however, we do not always wish for a character to stay the same throughout a story. If we regard her as morally deficient, we might hope that she will change. We see a movie in which a real estate agent has always valued ladder climbing above all else, leading her to be consistently selfish and unscrupulous. She should make a radical break with her past, we might feel—embrace a sharp discontinuity. Instead of appealing to narrative integrity, our judgment of her might invoke some extranarrative ideal, such as fairness or generosity. As Arthur Frank points out, narrative ethics must take care not to make narrative integrity a master principle or ideal, for consistency with one’s past alone “hardly

guarantees good future decisions.”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, as a narrative ideal, integrity offers narrative ethicists a useful starting point as they try to understand how a story should unfold.<sup>12</sup>

To see this, consider the connection between narrative integrity and the extranarrative ideal of authenticity, a value that has come to pervade Western culture over the last two centuries. As Carl Elliott observes, “‘To thine own self be true’ articulates perfectly the notion of authenticity as a moral ideal: the idea that we each have a way of living that is uniquely our own, and that we are each called to live in our own way rather than that of someone else.”<sup>13</sup> Authenticity has to do with realizing one’s special talents and aspirations and desires, but it also involves drawing on one’s unique history. Real persons and fictional characters achieve integrity and authenticity in part by being faithful to those aspects of their histories that they regard as most significant, by being true to themselves in that way. The yearning for sex-reassignment surgery would strike many people as strange or even abhorrent. But when Jan Morris casts that yearning as part of her quest for authenticity in her memoir, *Conundrum*, claiming that, even as a very young boy, she knew that she had been born into the wrong body, “we immediately understand what she means,” Elliott writes.<sup>14</sup> We sympathize with her desire to be faithful to her past. Guided by our ethos of authenticity and the value of narrative integrity, we appreciate a life story that builds on or extends those aspects of its subject’s history that she regards as most important. And this is so whether the life story is that of a fictional character or a real person. Such a story and its subject achieve what we might call *authentic integrity*.

Authentic integrity is an ideal that a person or character might achieve to

varying extents. Contrary to what Tom Tomlinson has argued, even if narrative “coherence can be achieved through indefinitely many routes,” it does not follow that those various routes will produce narratives with *equal* unity or coherence.<sup>15</sup> “My narrative (my story so far),” Tomlinson writes, “will shape what I do no matter what I do. And no matter what I do, it will be intelligible within the narrative of my life.”<sup>16</sup> Different courses of action will produce stories that “will all equally be unities,” Tomlinson claims.<sup>17</sup> But this is misguided. Authentic integrity emphasizes what is most important to the subject of a life story. So any particular life story will be more or less intelligible, more or less unified, due to its relationship to its subject’s ways of valuing her past. As a child, I loved baseball, and I played the sport for a few years. But it would be almost unintelligible for me to drop everything now and pursue a career as a professional baseball player. And that is partly because, for me, that part of my past no longer bears much value. Were I a character in a story who changed course in such an arbitrary way, readers would disapprove of my unity or integrity as a character. And were I *really* to act in such a way, I would experience my own story as terribly fragmented, almost incoherent, and therefore lacking—in this respect, at least—in meaning and worth. So, for narrative ethics, the extent to which a life story achieves authentic integrity can serve as one component of a moral assessment of that life.

Sometimes, a person’s or character’s achievement of authentic integrity has to do with his response to the sort of severe break or disruption that Bruner has discussed. In Wallace’s story, the AR finds himself in the midst of precisely such a break, and the narrative leaves him there. Nevertheless, drawing on the ideas discussed previously,

narrative ethics can understand the AR's response to the VP as one that is personal, in that, from the AR's perspective (and from ours), that act *could* infuse his life story with greater authentic integrity. To see how, consider the AR's ex-wife. We do not know when or why their marriage ended, what they might feel for each other now, or whether they maintain any relationship at all. But we do know that her influence on him persists. Early in the story, before his encounter with the VP, the AR has a brief experience of his "helmeted scooter as Shetland centaur, sprite-ridden," and this vision is attributed to his ex-wife's interest in "the combined and confabulated sides of things" (p. 47). Later, we learn more about her: she was "the petite new-Bohemian almond-eyed Red Cross volunteer instructor" who certified the AR in CPR "and whom the Account Representative had, one spontaneous and quartz-lit evening, bought a cup of coffee and a slice of nine-grain toast, and had asked to the Sales Trainees' Annual Formal, and had married" (p. 51). These passages carry special weight because, with one small exception,<sup>18</sup> they convey all that we know of the AR's past and life outside of the Building. They are the only points at which the story briefly inflates his otherwise constricted existence. No matter how rote and impersonal the AR's life has become, we learn—and, more significantly, the AR remembers—that he has not always been such a person. He used to be capable of care and spontaneity, and the fact that he recalls this segment of his past seems to suggest that he yearns to embody those traits again.

Most importantly, the AR's ex-wife continues to influence him in that he seems to regard his response to the VP as his obedience to her "dictum" to err, when in doubt, "always on the side of prepared care and readiness to preserve

minimal life-function, until help could arrive" (p. 51). In light of this motivation, the AR has an opportunity to understand his giving CPR to the VP as a personal act that builds a bridge of continuity with his past, an act through which he might revive the more affectionate and spontaneous person he once was. That is, in the midst of this break or disruption—that of another's urgent need for care, but also the AR's troubling vision of himself—the AR has a chance to bring more unity or coherence to his life story by being true to the person he was with his ex-wife.<sup>19</sup> As Bruner notes, Aristotle refers to such a severe break or disruption as a "peripeteia."<sup>20</sup> "Knowing where the peripeteia has happened, or is occurring at this moment in people's lives, is essential for grasping their story . . . and beginning to recognize how they might go on from here," Martha Montello proposes.<sup>21</sup> This disruption presents the AR and his self-narrative with a momentous opportunity to grow in authentic integrity.

However, in the end, we do not know what impact the AR's response to the VP will have on the younger man's self-narrative. Through this encounter, will he overcome his shivering isolation, his habitual distance keeping from others? Will he fully revive his capacities for intimacy and spontaneity? We cannot say. Just as the life of the VP hangs in the balance, the AR remains in moral limbo between impersonality and greater authentic integrity. The story ends with the AR still "bent to what two lives required, below everything," as he calls "for help again and again" (p. 52). Unfortunately, the outlook seems bleak. Despite the AR's persistent cries for help, his shouts fail to reach the municipal street high above, where "two lovers walked . . . listening for but hearing always no real difference" in the sounds of the city (p. 50). Furthermore, the AR's



strength is quickly fading: his “arms and lumbar” begin to burn, and he breathes and sweats heavily (p. 51). On the other hand, perhaps there is reason for guarded optimism. As Kasia Boddy notes, simply by running to aid his fallen colleague, the AR has already accomplished the seemingly impossible: he has made parallel lines meet.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, on what appears to be Wallace’s mature view, a morally reinvigorated AR need not abandon his corporate commitment. On the contrary, for Wallace—who appears to have shared Stanley Cavell’s “Romantic view of ‘the everyday’ as ‘an exceptional achievement’”<sup>23</sup>—the AR might find a way to return admirably to his post in Accounts, assimilating his newly recovered characteristics to his current profession.<sup>24</sup>

### Medical Encounters That Strike Home

In a discussion of how painful a medical relationship can be, Rita Charon quotes one of her medical students: “What happens . . . if the patient’s problem is something that you are personally having to deal with? What happens if it strikes home?” At age twelve,” Charon explains, “this student had lost her mother to gastric cancer, and she had just interviewed a patient whose mother had been diagnosed with the same disease.”<sup>25</sup> To this student, Charon acknowledged that “much of medicine . . . strikes home.”<sup>26</sup> Not only can doctors contract diseases from their patients, she says, but “we also get emotionally and existentially wounded by patients who arouse anxieties or who . . . force us to reexperience painful episodes in our own lives or to face unresolved ongoing conflicts. As we get more skilled in our work,” she concludes, “we learn not to dodge reminders of personal suffering but to allow our own injuries to increase the potency of our care of patients” by strengthening

our “empathic bond with others who suffer.”<sup>27</sup>

Wallace’s story has something to say about a medical encounter that strikes home. But whereas Charon focuses on how an intrapersonal encounter of this kind might lead to more empathy for patients, the AR’s predicament alludes to possible benefits for clinicians. When a patient reminds a healthcare provider of something disconcerting from her past, might this not present her, the clinician, with an opportunity to develop morally? Wallace’s story suggests that the answer is yes: when it disturbs, an intrapersonal encounter might prove to be an opportunity for the clinician to achieve greater authentic integrity. Like the Account Representative, the clinician could approach such a patient encounter as a chance to grow by reclaiming some neglected but important part of her past—as long as her doing so is in line with the most appropriate care for the patient, as Charon reminds us.<sup>28</sup> Now, with the cancer patient mentioned previously, the clinician might grieve as she once should have grieved, show the compassion that she didn’t show, confront the fear that she couldn’t face, or whatever else. She might do something like that which, once upon a time, she failed to do for others or for herself.

### Conclusion

“In dark times,” Wallace said in an interview,

the definition of good art would seem to be art that locates and applies CPR to those elements of what’s human and magical that still live and glow despite the times’ darkness. Really good fiction could have as dark a worldview as it wished, but it’d find a way both to depict this dark world *and* to illuminate the possibilities for being alive and human in it.<sup>29</sup>

The world of “Luckily the Account Representative Knew CPR” is bleak and bare, but the story itself qualifies as what Wallace deemed “good art,” for the text hints that, in his response to the VP, the Account Representative has a chance to resuscitate something of his diminished humanity. He could begin to revive some of his former and—by his own lights—better traits. Accordingly, narrative ethics can see the AR’s response as an opportunity for him to overcome his impersonality and to infuse his life story with greater authentic integrity. Similarly, when their patients’ experiences remind them of their own fragmented narratives, clinicians might, if appropriate, respond in ways that bring more authentic integrity to their own life stories, healing themselves.

I believe the concept of authentic integrity can be a useful addition to narrative ethics literature and practice, casting related ideas like autonomy, authenticity, deliberation, and narrative integrity in a new light. Following the contours of Wallace’s story, I have considered authentic integrity in connection with the particular experience of a (non-professional) healthcare provider, and I have sought to draw a lesson for clinicians similarly troubled by patient encounters. But the concept would seem to have broader applications for how we understand the appropriate unfolding of the life stories of patients, their families, and their healthcare providers, for each has a significant past in relationship to which she—and we—are likely to value her achievement of greater authentic integrity.

## Notes

1. Wallace D. Luckily the account representative knew CPR. In: Wallace D. *Girl with Curious Hair*. New York: Norton; 1989, at 52. Subsequent references to this story are given parenthetically.
2. Marshall Boswell regards this story as a moral milestone in Wallace’s oeuvre, for “Wallace

here first announces a theme that will assume central importance in *Infinite Jest*, namely that our isolation from one another as well as our inability to access the interior of others causes us the sort of pain that paradoxically joins us together.” Boswell M. *Understanding David Foster Wallace*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press; 2003, at 77–8.

3. Because theirs are the only vehicles in the parking garage, the AR knows that they are the last two executives to leave the office. Furthermore, the AR regularly works late into the evening (p. 45). So the AR could infer that the VP’s poor health and heart attack are partly the result of the “weary” work in which the VP has been engaged, presumably, for decades (p. 48). Given the AR’s professional trajectory, none of this augurs well for his own future.
4. This exposition of the Kantian imperfect duty of beneficence owes much to Karen Stohr, who argues that, even within the framework of that *imperfect* duty, a person can have a *strict obligation* to provide aid on specific occasions. Stohr K. Kantian beneficence and the problem of obligatory aid. *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 2011;8(1):45–67.
5. There seems to be a further analogy between the AR and the building in which he works: in preserving the VP’s “minimal-life function” (p. 51), the AR is like the Building, which is anatomized as “autonomic” (p. 52), “vaguely pulsing” (p. 48), and capable of respiration, for it releases a “great breath, a spatial sigh” (p. 45). The suggestion seems to be that, just as the AR barely sustains the VP, the Building likewise does nothing on a daily basis for the AR other than maintain his minimal-life function until something or someone might arrive to help him.
6. Bruner J. *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2002, at 64.
7. See note 6, Bruner 2002, at 65.
8. See note 6, Bruner 2002, at 78.
9. Bruner J. Narratives of human plight: A conversation with Jerome Bruner. In: Charon R, Montello M, eds. *Stories Matter: The Role of Narrative in Medical Ethics*. London: Routledge; 2002, at 4.
10. See note 9, Bruner 2002, at 4.
11. Frank AW. Narrative ethics as dialogical storytelling. *Hastings Center Report* 2014;44(1):S16–S20, at S19.
12. By arguing that narrative integrity is a narrative ideal, or a value that is rooted partly in our experience of stories, I am contending with Tom Tomlinson’s claim that only “extranarrative ideals” can be used to evaluate life stories morally. Because narrative integrity by itself

- confers *some* degree of meaning and worth on a life—even if it is a meager degree of worth in the case of a deplorable person—Tomlinson errs in regarding “conceptions of the best way to live” as entirely separate from “conceptions of the best way to write a story.” Tomlinson T. Perplexed about narrative ethics. In: Nelson H, ed. *Stories and Their Limits: Narrative Approaches to Bioethics*. London: Routledge; 1997, at 130–1.
13. Elliott C. *Better than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream*. New York: Norton; 2003, at 29.
  14. See note 13, Elliott 2003, at 30–1.
  15. See note 12, Tomlinson 1997, at 130–1.
  16. See note 12, Tomlinson 1997, at 130.
  17. See note 12, Tomlinson 1997, at 130.
  18. The AR is “an inveterate thrower of stones at the skins of ponds” (p. 50).
  19. The AR’s interactions with the VP are replete with sexual imagery, which gives readers—and perhaps the AR—a further basis for relating this current act of care to his former romance. We are told that the AR is “straddling” the VP (p. 50). The AR also uses “a clean slender finger” to clear the VP’s “cervically pink throat” (p. 50) and gives him mouth-to-mouth breaths “down through the . . . full but faintly blue lips and titled head” (p. 51). Near the end of the story, the narrator’s language also echoes that used in many marriage ceremonies: The VP’s “life” is “now literally” the AR’s “to have and to hold, for a lifetime” (p. 51). Similarly, another of Wallace’s stories in the same collection expresses the idea that the whole point of “love” is to be “permeable,” “to get your fingers through the holes in the lover’s mask.” Wallace D. Little expressionless animals. In: Wallace 1989 (see note 1), at 13, 32. On that point, see Boddy K. A fiction of response: *Girl with Curious Hair* in context. In: Boswell M, Burn SJ, eds. *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; 2013.
  20. See note 9, Bruner 2002, at 4.
  21. Montello M. Narrative ethics. *Hastings Center Report* 2014;44(1):S2–S6, at S5.
  22. See note 19, Boddy 2013.
  23. See note 19, Boddy 2013, at 37.
  24. In Wallace’s *The Pale King*, a substitute instructor for an undergraduate course in accounting (no less!) remarks: “Enduring tedium over real time in a confined space is what real courage is.” So, beyond the courage that our story’s accountant exhibits by enduring the tedium of CPR in the claustrophobic parking garage, perhaps he would also show a kind of courage by returning to the grind of his confined space in Accounts. Wallace D. *The Pale King: An Unfinished Novel*. Pietsch M, ed. New York: Little, Brown; 2011, at 227.
  25. Charon R. The narrative road to empathy. In: Spiro HM, Peschel E, Curnen MGM, St. James D, eds. *Empathy and the Practice of Medicine: Beyond Pills and the Scalpel*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; 1993, at 158.
  26. See note 25, Charon 1993, at 158.
  27. See note 25, Charon 1993, at 158.
  28. See note 25, Charon 1993, at 158.
  29. Wallace D. An interview with Larry McCaffery. *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 1993;13(2): 127–50, at 131.