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Stephen Davies, Philosophy, University of Auckland

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Review of Peter Goldie's *The Mess Inside*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Moral philosophers often write as if they are always calm, rational, and in control of their lives. There is no hint that they might have suffered doubt about their moral intuitions, cringed in embarrassment or guilt at their past behaviour, been paralysed by indecision or depression, or suffered existential anguish in a potentially life-changing circumstance. Yet it is a virtue of this fine account of moral psychology by Peter Goldie that all these situations and more are covered in this book. As its title acknowledges, more often than we would like to think, the story of our inner lives is chaotic and messy.

In discussing how we attempt to plot our character and direct our moral progress, Goldie not only considers hypothetical scenarios but also apparently draws on personal experiences on which he has reflected in depth. "When we are in the process of revising our deeply valued traits, with which in some sense we identify, we are typically in a state of conflict and confusion. ... [This] can be a good thing as a necessary part of a psychological process of profound change in one's values, and in particular changes in one's defining traits ... It typically happens when one is falling in love ... or falling out of love. It typically happens when one is in anguish about whether to make a dramatic change in one's career—perhaps from being a philosopher to being an investment banker" (142). Goldie in fact made the opposite transition. But we should not conclude that all of his examples are autobiographical. I doubt, for instance, that he roller-bladed into the church on the occasion of his sister's wedding, an example with which he illustrates retrospective embarrassment (155). The personal tone of the writing adds a touchingly humane aspect to this deeply insightful, subtle, and philosophically engaging discussion.

The primary topic of this book is the nature of the narratives we tell about our past and future as part of the projects of making sense of our identities, both to ourselves and to others, and of affirming or challenging the commitments and values that define our lives.

The book begins with an account of narrative, which Goldie distinguishes from annals, chronicles, or lists, in that it shapes, organises and colours the events it narrates from a certain perspective, thereby giving them coherence, meaningfulness, and emotional import.

When a narrative is told (or thought) by a person about her past, it involves both an internal perspective (that of her prior self) and an external one (that of her current self as narrator). Goldie presents two notions as key here: that of *dramatic irony*, in which the teller (and audience) know things that the subject of the telling does not, and that of *free indirect style*, which is a narrative technique illustrated in the sentence "I watched the orchestra through stupid tears." Free indirect style draws attention to the ironic gap between the narrator and the narratee at the same time as it closes and confounds the distinction between them, infecting the past, internal perspective with the knowledge, values, or emotions that infuse the perspective from which the narrative is told. In Goldie's view, a person's current evaluation of and response to her former self rivets her to her past—that is, the evaluative response ties her to and penetrates into that past—notwithstanding the difference between her present and past selves.

At this point, Goldie interpolates a case study of grief, which he characterises as a process, rather than as a mental state, that is best understood and explained through narrative. As a process, grief presents a characteristically shaped pattern (of thoughts, feelings, memories, imaginings, and actions). The narrative of grief relates memories of the lost one and, through free indirect style, fuses the perspectives, so that a recalled event is related as "the last time he did this" though that was not internal to the perspective on the action as it happened. This approach preserves and respects the remembered past even as it also reconfigures it in a way that can permit emotional closure on the part of the griever.

When a narrative is told (or thought) by a person about his future, Goldie holds that again there is an ironic gap between the external and internal perspectives presented. For instance, in imaging the future from an internal perspective he might imagine what emotions he would experience, and this can lead him *to experience* the emotion within the imaginary context. (Goldie is aware that this claim, that we can not only imagine experiencing an emotion but also that doing so can actually induce the emotion, is not commonly held.) And at the same time the man might react emotionally, from the external perspective, to what he imagines, with the internal and external emotions perhaps being different. For example, in imagination he feels proud of his cleverness, though from the external perspective he feels shame, because he recognises the imagined future as one in which he (continues to) fail to curb his vanity. Meanwhile, remembering the past is similar in these and other respects with imagining the future.

Another case study, this time of self-forgiveness, is introduced. Contrary to a widely held view, Goldie argues that one can genuinely forgive oneself for wronging another. (The case is one in which forgiveness cannot be sought from the person wronged, perhaps because that person is dead or because drawing attention to the earlier wrong would now cause some greater moral harm.) Self-forgiveness is possible, however, only with the appropriate degree of genuine contrition, plus a desire to change and renew oneself, so that one's earlier self can be seen from a sufficiently distinct current perspective. An equivalent case, Goldie appreciates, is that in which a person should be pardoned for a wrong he did to another, because, though he desperately resisted, he was psychologically incapable of saving himself from the wrongful action under the circumstances, and yet even recognising that he was overcome, he nevertheless deeply regrets his incapacity to do the right thing.

According to Goldie, there is a narrative sense of self, a sense of oneself in narrative thinking, as having a past, a present, and a future. This narrative can draw not only on the narrator's experiential memories but also on her propositional memory, that is, on what she has learned of her past from others. The narrative can have gaps but it represents a continuous trail through time. As this view, together with the account of the role of free indirect style, implies, the

self survives, even through radical conversions. The self need not be stable over time nor need it view its past favourably, Goldie notes. He suggests that the basic sense of survival in first-person narratives—that we refer to our past, present, and future selves as "I"—is sufficient for personal survival, as well as for the persistence of contractual and moral responsibility for the actions of one's former self.

Autobiographical narratives can be factual and true in something like the way that historical and causal descriptions can be, Goldie maintains, but they lack the objectivity of these approaches to the extent that they are ineluctably perspectival and emotionally engaged. Notwithstanding this, they can be objective in the sense that the narrator adopts an external perspective that is appropriate to the narrative's (factual) internal content, regretting what ought to be regretted, feeling proud where achievement was genuine and hard won, and so on. But Goldie acknowledges also that we do have a tendency to narrativise and thereby to distort our life stories. We present our lives as self-authored and as thereby always under our control, which they are not; we find agency in the world where there is none, and describe it as impinging on us; we yearn for unity and closure in the tale, though life and death are contingent and not narratively structured; and we inaptly view our lives in terms of literary genres and the character traits these call for. This last vice can sometimes be turned into a virtue, Goldie thinks, where it takes a form in which, for example, a forward-facing narrative in which we triumph over evil or disaster helps steel our moral resolve and courage to face the future. In any case, awareness of the ways we may be inclined misleadingly to fictionalise our autobiographies can help us to resist the tendency.

Peter Goldie deserves the final say: "Narrative thinking about our lives, and about the lives of others, is bound up with our emotions and our values. To the complaint that narrative thinking is messy and imprecise, blurring all kinds of nice distinctions—between internal and external perspectives, between what is remembered and how one remembers, between a narrative's content and its framework, between the desire for emotional closure and the desire for narrative closure—the right reply is that this is just what it should be, given that

life itself is messy. We must resist the temptation to oversimplify life, the mind,  
the life of the mind" (173).

Stephen Davies,  
Department of Philosophy,  
University of Auckland.