



# The Self in Moral Space: Life Narrative and the Good

*David B. Parker*

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## **The Self in Moral Space: Life Narrative and the Good** David B. Parker

All of us take our moral bearings from a conception of the good, or a range of goods, that we consider most important. We are in this sense selves in moral space. Building on the work of the philosopher Charles Taylor, among others, David Parker examines a range of classic and contemporary autobiographies—including those of St. Augustine, William Wordsworth, Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Gosse, Roland Barthes, Seamus Heaney, and J. M. Coetzee—to reveal a whole domain of life narrative that has been previously ignored, one that enables a new approach to the question of what constitutes a "good" life narrative. Moving from an ethics toward an aesthetics of life writing, Parker follows Wittgenstein's view that ethics and aesthetics are one. The Self in Moral Space is distinctive in that its key ethical question is not What is it right for the life writer to do? but the broader question What is it good to be? This question opens up an important debate with the dominant postmodern paradigms that prevail in life writing studies today. In Parker's estimation, such paradigms are incapable of explaining why life writing matters in the contemporary context. Life narrative, he argues, faces readers with the perennial ethical question How should a human being live? We need a new reconstructive paradigm, as offered by this book, in order to gain a fuller understanding of life narrative and its humanistic potential.

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