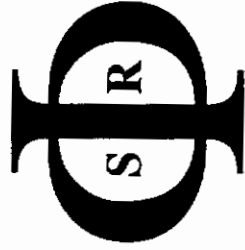


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Abstract

I begin this paper by looking at Alasdair MacIntyre's critique in *After Virtue* of Kierkegaard's notion of an ultimate choice between the aesthetic and the ethical, as described by the pseudonym Judge William in *Either/Or* Vol. II. MacIntyre argues that it implies that the normative force of ethical principles for a person depends solely on their arbitrary and reversible decision to recognize ethical distinctions—a choice that can be made for *no reason*. As a first step towards refuting this claim, in §II I argue that Kierkegaard's conception of moral motivation is internalist in a manner that follows Kant's *Religion*. I next hypothesize in §III that ultimate choice is not about the *authority* of ethical principles at all, but rather about their internal incorporation, which can also usefully be understood in terms of *identification* through higher-order volitions in Harry Frankfurt's sense. A detailed analysis of the relevant text in *Either/Or II* confirms this hypothesis, and shows that Kierkegaard, like Kant but unlike MacIntyre, believes that beyond the authority of ethical principles, the additional element of identification supplied by the choice is necessary for moral responsibility. Following this, in subsequent sections I consider how Kierkegaard's conception of moral choice mediates between Kantian and Aristotelian poles, and how this in fact enables it to answer traditional Hegelian objections that Kantian moral principles are too *impersonal* to have motivational authority. After clarifying the stages in the genesis of moral responsibility in Kierkegaard's model, which shows that there is some moral responsibility in the original choice-situation itself, I finally argue that Kierkegaard also has a subtle theory of inward or higher-order volitional character, which allows him to avoid the charge often brought against existentialism that it makes choices arbitrarily reversible and void of dispositional depth.

The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical: A Response to MacIntyre

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I. Introduction: MacIntyre's Critique of Kierkegaard

In chapter four of his *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* [*Enten-Eller* in Danish] we witness the failure of the Enlightenment Project to provide a "rational justification of morality" to persons characterized by their transcendental freedom.¹ This failure and its results, we are told, occur primarily because the Enlightenment was unable to demonstrate how moral "rules of conduct" can have "authority" or "gerundive force" for concrete agents. MacIntyre argues that the failure of Kant's moral theory in particular is evident when Kierkegaard's pseudonym 'Judge William' suggests in *Either/Or* II that a "radical and ultimate choice" is the only entrance into morality.²

MacIntyre notes that as the Judge presents it, "The choice between the ethical and the aesthetic is not the choice between good and evil, it is the choice whether or not to choose in terms of good and evil."³ But he argues that the Judge's portrayal of this choice as "ultimate"—i.e. as one in which "there are no rational grounds for choice between either position"—is *inconsistent* with the Judge's presentation of 'the ethical' as "that realm in which principles have authority over us independently of our attitudes, preferences, and feelings."⁴ If this is what the ethical attitude is, how can it be an option for radical choice? The result, MacIntyre thinks, is an incoherent combination of "the notion of radical choice with an unquestioning acceptance of *the* ethical."⁵ Kierkegaard's Judge regards traditional Kantian norms as having objective authority, yet

the doctrine of *Enten-Eller* [*Either/Or*] is plainly to the effect that the principles which depict the ethical way of life are to be adopted *for no reason*, but for a choice that lies beyond reasons, just because it is the choice of what is to count for us as a reason.⁶

Kierkegaard does not state any such "doctrine" in *Either/Or*, plainly or otherwise. Rather, the Judge presents the absolute choice as a free act in the inward world of personality,⁷ but he denies that it is an *arbitrary* choice.⁸ But MacIntyre's argument is that, in spite of Kierkegaard's intentions, the either/or between the aesthetic and ethical categories *must* be a choice in which the objective force of ethical norms cannot count as reasons. For if a hypothetical chooser is faced with the decision between the ethical and the aesthetic as ways of life, or modes of existence, then

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...he can be offered no reason for preferring one to the other. For if a given reason offers support for the ethical way of life—to live in that way will serve the demands of duty or to live in that way will be to accept moral perfection as a goal and so to give a certain kind of meaning to one's actions—the person who has not yet embraced either the ethical or the aesthetic still has to choose whether or not to treat this reason as having any force.⁹

If we grant this interpretation, then the incoherence in Kierkegaard's account would be inevitable. Since, as MacIntyre avers, principles for action only acquire objective authority when "good reasons" for them can be addressed to the person concerned, any authority ethical principles might have for us must be grounded in reasons rather than in radical choice.¹⁰

Despite the enormous influence of this critique, most Kierkegaard scholars reject MacIntyre's argument along with other reductive interpretations of *Either/Or*. For example, in his article on "Kierkegaard's Metatheology," Timothy Jackson characterizes the "picture that emerges" from critics such as Stout, Rosen, Fenger, and MacIntyre as follows: "[it is] one of S.K. as romantic egoist, totally unwilling or unable to argue for the choice of one way of life over another—a sort of 'dead-end Werther'..."¹¹ Jackson notes that better informed commentators such as Wild, Malantschuk, and Elrod have adequately shown the errors of "those who would identify such phrases as 'subjectivity is truth' and 'the leap of faith' with moral relativism and religious fideism..."¹² Nevertheless, I think MacIntyre's objection should not be dismissed too quickly, because it gives voice to several deeper misgivings about Kierkegaardian "subjective" choice that reveal the roots of widely held reservations about existentialism in general.

In this paper, I will argue that three closely related errors are woven together in MacIntyre's charge of incoherence in *Either/Or* II. First, MacIntyre's objection implies that Kierkegaard's conception of choice commits him to a form of 'metaethical externalism' inconsistent with his broadly Kantian notion of morality (which is closely related to the common misconception that Kierkegaard has a *fideist* conception of faith¹³). The second error is an interpretative one: MacIntyre misreads Kierkegaard's text as implying that what is at stake in the absolute either/or is a choice to regard the moral distinction between good and evil as having authority or normative force. I will argue that this is not what is at stake in the choice at all. When we analyze the crucial passages in the first thirty pages of the "Equilibrium Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical"¹⁴ with Kierkegaard's Kantian conception of the conditions for moral responsibility in mind, we see that MacIntyre has simply gotten the wrong impression. Third, MacIntyre's objection assumes that since it involves negative liberty, Kierkegaardian choice must be *arbitrary* over time, and hence irreconcil-

able with motivation by any rational judgment of objective value. This 'arbitrariness' objection is the one usually raised against Sartre's conception of human freedom. Whether or not it is fair to compare Sartre with emotivists and utilitarians, as MacIntyre also does,¹⁵ I will show that the arbitrariness critique is absolutely misplaced when brought against Kierkegaard.

I will take up each of these three problems in turn. By the end of the analysis, we will see how Kierkegaard not only avoids the traditional problems thought to attend existentialist conceptions of freedom and moral responsibility, but also makes a positive contribution towards resolving these problems and rescuing the 'Enlightenment Project.'

II. Kierkegaard's Internalism

In her paper on Kant's argument in *Groundwork* I, Christine Korsgaard notes that Kant followed 18th century rationalists in objecting to the 'externalist' conceptions of moral reasons offered by their sentimentalist opponents.¹⁶ Externalism, as she explains, is the view that the reason why an action is right (or required) cannot be the subjective (or first-personal) motive for performing it. If we distinguish the objective "requiredness of an action" (its *binding* status) from our subjective feeling of being "under an obligation" to perform it, then we can think of externalists as separating these facets of duty.¹⁷ Internalists, on the other hand, hold that

Moral reasons motivate because they are perceived as binding. A good person... does the right thing because it is the right thing, or acts from the motive of duty.¹⁸

This 'internalist' principle can be understood as a *metaethical* restriction on substantive theories of normative legitimacy: whatever more specific principles are taken as sufficient to confer normative or binding status on a rule, action, or end must also be such that its resulting *objective rightness* can itself motivate the person. This metaethical principle leads internalists of every sort to reject any claim that the authority of moral principles can be grounded on bases that appear purely *positive* or decisionistic, such as divine commands or the choices of a Hobbesian sovereign: "Either we are obliged to obey the sovereign, [Samuel] Clarke argues, in which case obligation is prior to positive law, or there is no real obligation at all."¹⁹ As Korsgaard goes on to show, Kant's task in the *Groundwork* is to respond to Hume's externalism by developing a conception of normative rightness which will meet the internalist requirements.

Despite Kierkegaard's indebtedness to Kant in *Either/Or*, MacIntyre's critique of the Judge's either/or implies that it leads to the aporia of externalism: if there is any *reason* for choosing the ethical as one's

framework, then that reason cannot be the *motive* for doing so, since the choice is reasonless. This claim that Kierkegaard's theory necessarily implies externalism, however, still depends on MacIntyre's hypothesis that Kierkegaard intends an absolute choice to serve as a *substitute* for Kantian pure practical reason:

Kierkegaard and Kant agree in their conception of morality, but Kierkegaard inherits that conception together with an understanding that the project of giving a rational vindication of morality has failed. Kant's failure provided Kierkegaard with his starting point: the act of choice has to be called in to do the work that reason could not do.²⁰

Thus Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* is supposed to be the last gasp of the Enlightenment Project: he is trying to make choice work as the basis for binding normative force, when Kantian practical reason has failed to do this. Crucial as it is to MacIntyre's entire project in *After Virtue* , this hypothesis is very dubious. The Judge in *Either/Or* certainly never says that rational defenses of moral principles have failed; MacIntyre simply supplies this hypothetical motivation because he wrongly assumes that Kierkegaard has no other *independent* reasons for introducing the absolute choice between the ethical and the aesthetic.

But before I supply an alternative hypothesis, it is important to realize that, even if in his later religious works and *Edifying Discourses* , Kierkegaard does not ultimately accept Kant's formalist definition of normativity in terms of 'lawlike form' alone, he never deviates from the *metaethical* principle that an action is ethical only when the objective normativity of acting for certain ends is itself the motive for so acting. Kierkegaard is in broad agreement with Kant that morality is "universal" and never justified by mere preferences or commands: moral character depends entirely on an *inward* motivation by *recognition* of good ends and right actions themselves. Ample passages in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* as well as other works confirm this. To take just one example, in the *Postscript* , the pseudonymous author 'Johannes Climacus' declares that "the true ethical enthusiasm consists in willing to the utmost limits of one's powers, but at the same time being so uplifted in divine jest as never to think about the accomplishment." Conversely, when the will measures its motives by outcomes, it becomes "greedy for reward, and even if it accomplishes something great, it does not do so ethically: the individual demands something else than the ethical itself."²¹ Here Climacus affirms the core of metaethical internalism: acting ethically means acting for the sake of the ethical, which means being motivated by nothing outside the ethical rightness of the acts, or the goodness of their ends.²² Similarly, in *Fear and Trembling* , Kierkegaard's pseudonym 'Johannes de Silentio' affirms that

the highest stage of the ethical (which is directly prior to religious faith) is *absolute resignation* , in which one acts purely from the 'motive of duty' in Kant's sense—even without any practical hope of realizing the ends one is obliged to will.

The metaethical internalism Kierkegaard inherits from Kant also explains why he is *not* , contrary to widespread assumption, a fideist. In Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* ,²³ we not only find the model for Kierkegaard's "ethical choices" in Kant's idea of good and evil ultimate "dispositions" (highest-order maxims that are *chosen* by the transcendental self);²⁴ we also find Kant's thesis that a *moral revolution* in ultimate character is possible. Without this possibility, the *eschatological* promise of a final balance between happiness and virtue could have no genuinely *ethical* significance for us, but only serve as an 'external' incentive. Unless the promise of salvation *requires* a moral revolution in one's ultimate character, then motivation by this eschatological promise will amount only to divine favor-seeking of the sort Nietzsche suspected, rather than religious rectitude in accord with pure practical reason. In such religions "which are endeavors to win favor,"

... man flatters himself by believing either that God can make him eternally happy (through remission of sins) without his having to become a better man, or else, if this seems impossible, that God can certainly make him a better man without his having to do anything more than to ask for it.²⁵

The thesis of moral revolution, then, is motivated by Kant's own opposition to the Lutheran doctrine of *sola fide* : unless we can bring about the revolution in our own ultimate maxim, or at least to take the initiative to accept grace, then *good works* are not even a necessary condition for salvation. Our ultimate character cannot be fixed from all time, because if it is, then *good works* and moral duty have no religious significance at all.²⁶

It is well known that Kierkegaard was influenced by Kant's *Religion* .²⁷ But it is less well understood that Kierkegaard shared Kant's view that an ethical component (such as 'good works') was necessarily included in salvation through faith. Not only is this clear in Kierkegaard's later religious writings;²⁸ it is also suggested in passages early in *Fear and Trembling* that are clearly intended as barbs against Danish adherents to *sola fide* . For example, Johannes de *Silentio* tells us that in the "world of spirit" where justice applies, it "holds true that only the one who *works* gets bread..."²⁹ The indispensability of good works is expressed for Kierkegaard by the fact that the religious stage is only accessible *through* the ethical stage, which implies that strong moral virtue *remains* a necessary condition within the stage 'beyond' it. *Fear and Trembling* also makes clear that faith which does not dialectically retain within it a commitment to ethical ends and good works, will be mere *aesthetic childishness* .³⁰ Moreover, the movement of

faith is a volitional movement that identifies the self with its absolute relation to the Divine: it is not constituted by willing to believe something about the truth-value of propositions *sola fide*. Thus, the sense in which the religious stage of faith is 'beyond reason' is the same as the sense in which it is 'beyond the ethical': it contains reason dialectically within it, just as it contains the ethical. Kierkegaard's 'beyonds,' unlike Nietzsche's, are *cumulative*, and for this reason, Kierkegaard is not in any sense a fideist.

These reflections give us abundant antecedent reason to believe that Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works generally oppose an externalist analysis of ethical obligation in relation to the heroic will and to faith. This is all the more reason to suspect that if MacIntyre's interpretation leads to the opposite conclusion, something has gone wrong in that interpretation.

III. Authentic Identification and the Choice of the Ethical

As we saw, MacIntyre thinks that for Kierkegaard, the 'absolute' choice between the aesthetic and the ethical is supposed to be the basis of the authority that ethical principles have for the individual. Although he cites no particular passages to support this, the infamously difficult ones that might give this impression are found near the beginning of the "Equilibrium" letter, where, after explaining that "choice" in the "strict sense" always means an ethical choice of good or evil,³¹ the Judge nevertheless adds:

My either/or does not in the first instance denote the choice between good and evil; it denotes the choice whereby one chooses good and evil/or excludes them. Here the question is under what determinants one would contemplate the whole of existence and would himself live.... It is, therefore, not so much a question of choosing between willing the good or the evil, as of choosing to will, but by this in turn the good and evil are posited.³²

The 'primordial' choice described here, which I will refer to as 'choice_p' for short, is thus the choice whether or not to choose ethically ('choose_e' for short), where the ethical choice_e implies a particular sort of moral responsibility. But by a choice_e that falls within the category of moral responsibility, Kierkegaard means something more than what MacIntyre (following Aristotle) calls an intelligible "human action."

To identify an occurrence as an [intelligible] action is in paradigmatic instances to identify it under a type of description which enables us to see that occurrence as flowing intelligibly from a human agent's intentions, motives, passions, and purposes. It is therefore to understand an action as something for which one is accountable.³³

For MacIntyre, it is intelligible human action—a performance that follows from 'internal' sources, such as preferences, desires, dispositions, cognitive apprehensions of value and reasoned deliberation—that involves human

persons in moral responsibility and distinguishes them from animals.³⁴ In this account, MacIntyre is probably also following Hegel.³⁵

Kierkegaard would not of course deny that when a person has performed a "human action" in MacIntyre's sense (i.e. performed something intelligible to herself and others in terms of its combined cognitive and emotive sources), she is *legally liable* for it. This Aristotelian condition allows us the classical distinction between *wrongs* and mere *harms*: for example, if she acts in a way that knowingly violates some law, the harm is not unintentional, but satisfies the standard for criminal culpability. Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works *never imply that the aesthete cannot recognize her legal liability for her actions in this sense, or be held to account for them like anyone else.*

Nevertheless, by definition, the aesthete does not choose 'in terms of the ethical.' By choice_e that is "absolutely ethical" in this *categorical* sense, then, Kierkegaard must mean something narrower than 'human action.' What the aesthete lacks in his actions is a "choice between good and evil"³⁶ that makes the *will* on which he acted good or evil. However, the will to which these moral predicates principally apply—as Kant famously suggested at the beginning of the *Groundwork*—is something deeper than the action-maxim that makes an action "intelligible" or "deliberate." It is an unreserved commitment that cannot be dissociated from the self, in the way that even deliberate actions sometimes can be dissociated.³⁷ As Kierkegaard's pseudonym writes in the *Postscript*:

The real action is not the external act, but an internal decision in which the individual puts an end to the mere possibility and *identifies himself* with the content of his thought in order to exist in it. This is the action.³⁸

It is only within the will in this deeper sense that Kierkegaard recognizes a capacity for *ethical choice* and character that has moral worth. What the agent thereby acquires is not merely liability for actions that flowed from an intention 'internal' to her, but *strong* moral responsibility for willing that intention itself.

However, for Kierkegaard, "ethical" choice_e that entails 'strong moral responsibility' will include not only (1) the *volitional conditions* which give one's actions the requisite personal significance required if the distinction between good and evil is to apply to the *motive* of one's act, but also (2) cognitive awareness of the objective authority of moral principles.³⁹ My hypothesis is that the Judge's primordial choice is about what is required to satisfy the *former* condition: it has nothing to do with meeting the latter. What is "posited" by this choice_p to choose ethically (or with strong moral responsibility) is not the *authority* of ethical principles but rather the volitional conditions under which the authority of such principles can become relevant to the moral worth of an individual's will. The aesthete's particular

actions may be judged right or wrong by themselves or by a third party, but without the choice_p to choose_e in terms of the ethical, they lack the kind of inward character that can be good or evil in the fullest sense, and hence their action cannot be internally *motivated* by these ethical distinctions.

This distinction between (1) and (2) does not occur to MacIntyre, because he begins with the tacit assumption that there is no further 'volitional' condition for moral responsibility beyond performing a 'human action.' Hence for MacIntyre, there are no actions for which people are liable which still lack the kind of motivations that can be morally worthy or unworthy. Yet this is precisely the state of the aesthete as Kierkegaard understands him. This is not to say that an aesthete lacks purposes, intentions, etc. in terms of which her action is intelligible or deliberate: rather, Kierkegaard recognizes that the presence of such 'inner' cognitive and emotive sources does not by itself establish the will to be a certain kind of *person*—the sort of volition that is required for strong moral responsibility. But since MacIntyre fails to see the difference between Kierkegaard's condition (1) and 'intelligible human action,' and since the aesthete clearly 'acts' in this latter Aristotelian sense, the aesthete and the ethical chooser would seem to differ only with respect to condition (2). As a result, MacIntyre must assume that the *only* difference made by the primordial choice between the aesthetic and ethical is a difference in recognition of the objective *authority* of the ethical principles.

If my hypothesis is right, then MacIntyre's analysis yields the reverse of the truth. For Kierkegaard, both the aesthete and the ethical chooser (the Judge) satisfy condition (2), but only the latter satisfies condition (1). And he comes to satisfy (1) by choosing_p to choose_e in terms of the ethical. Thus the role of the absolute existential choice_p is to establish an inward dimension of undissociable *volition*, which is distinct from an internal desire or tendency to an end that is sufficient for 'acting' in Aristotle's and Hegel's sense.

In defense of this hypothesis, I will show that it is both historically plausible and yields a convincing interpretation of the most difficult passages in *Either/Or* II. Kierkegaard's more subtle conception of the volitional conditions for moral responsibility has its philosophical origin at the beginning of Kant's *Religion*, in what Henry Allison has aptly termed the "Incorporation Thesis":⁴⁰

...freedom of the will [willkür] is of a wholly unique nature in that an incentive can determine the will [willkür] to an action *only so far as the individual has incorporated it into his maxim*.⁴¹

Kant's "Incorporation Thesis" assures us that moral responsibility for *doing action A to realize end E* requires something more than that *A* flowed from some mental state such as a preference impulse to realize *E*: *willing* that

end, and *acting* on that action-maxim, requires a choice which "incorporates" the desire for *E* into one's action-maxim. Although Kant's justification for the Incorporation Thesis is that it is entailed by negative liberty as a condition for moral responsibility,⁴² its most immediate implication is that moral responsibility for an action requires that the individual has *identified herself* with the motive on which she acted.

In recent years, the crucial significance of 'identification' in this sense has been brought out most forcefully by Harry Frankfurt. Beginning with his 1971 essay on "The Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," Frankfurt criticized Sir Peter Strawson for holding that certain cognitive capacities and "corporeal characteristics" taken together could be regarded as sufficient for personhood.⁴³ Frankfurt argues that it is not advanced capacities of reasoning and deliberation but "the structure of a person's will"⁴⁴ which accounts for their unique capacity for moral responsibility. A person not only has a first-order "will," which is defined as the "desire" (or preference, incentive) actually operative in her action,⁴⁵ but also *second-order volitions* to act (or not to act) on certain first-order desires.

Second-order volitions are important only because they explain how a person becomes morally responsible by *identifying* with or *alienating* his own first-order states of will. To illustrate this, Frankfurt considers three different addicts who "succeed inevitably to their periodic desires for the drug to which they are addicted."⁴⁶ The *unwilling addict* "hates his addiction" and will₂ not to will₁ to take the drug (i.e. not to act on his addictive desire), but his second-order volition is in vain, and he is "helplessly violated by his own desires."⁴⁷ Thus he does not *identify* with the desire on which he acts (he does not 'incorporate' it in Kant's sense). Since this addictive desire is *alienated* by his higher-order will, Frankfurt argues that the unwilling addict is not morally responsible for his action, whereas the willing addict is (whether or not it was his higher-order will which *brought about* that he acted on his addictive desire). It is *identification* not causation that makes him responsible for his action, on this account.⁴⁸

The third addict is "wanton," because he has no higher-order volition about the 'will' on which he acts. He neither identifies himself with his desire for the drugs, nor with an alternative desire to refrain from taking them: thus "he has no identity apart from his first-order desires."⁴⁹ As Frankfurt points out, a "wanton" in this sense may reason instrumentally, deliberating "concerning how to do what he wants to do," but he does not *care* which of his inclinations happens to determine 'what he wants to do.'⁵⁰ Thus the wanton takes no *inward stand* towards the first-order character he exhibits in his action; he does not *will* to act on one publicly intelligible motive, desire, or impulse rather than another.

In sum, Frankfurt holds that it is *intrasubjective identification* (through second-order volitions) that makes persons morally responsible for their actions. This conception of identification, which is anticipated in Kant's Incorporation Thesis,⁵¹ implies the idea of a *volitional identity*, which consists in the transcendental subject's inward will about the sort of *social self* she wants to have, i.e. the dispositions and projects she wishes to express in her actions. The *person* in Frankfurt's sense is this 'inward self,' which consists in the authentic will to be a certain sort of 'outward self.'⁵² A wanton lacks "personality" in this sense.

This brief summary of Frankfurt's analysis provides an invaluable basis for explaining the meaning of the Kierkegaardian 'choice,' to make ethically significant choices. By *ethical* "choice," between good and evil, or "the act of choosing" that is "essentially a proper and stringent expression of the ethical,"⁵³ the Judge means a *volition* which satisfies the condition for strong moral responsibility implied by Kant's Incorporation Thesis. In other words, "choice," means *authentic identification* in Frankfurt's sense. To *choose* in this sense, one cannot just 'wantonly' act on whatever preference wins out in the "economy of one's desires."⁵⁴ Rather, one must actively associate oneself with some form of deliberate action; the higher-order acts of identification this involves will then constitute an authentic inward self. The primordial choice,⁵ between the aesthetic and the ethical generally, then, is the choice *either* to be wanton, *or* to become a 'person' in the full Frankfurtian sense. If this interpretation can be sustained, then the choice to choose in terms of the ethical has nothing to do with choosing to regard ethical precepts as having normative authority: rather, it means a choice to engage in the kind of *authentic identification* that ethical principles of good and evil can guide—i.e. to will to act on certain motives, for the sake of identifying with those motives as constituents of the external character one wants as *one's own*.

Several themes in the Judge's discussion surrounding the 'primordial' either/or provide convincing proof of this interpretation. First of all, by the *aesthetic*, Kierkegaard clearly means something similar to wantonness in Frankfurt's sense. The Judge begins the "Equilibrium" letter by contrasting the either/or which characterizes "the ethical" with the careless *indifference* of the aesthete's attitude towards alternatives: "Do it/or don't do it—you will regret both'... 'I say *merely* either/or'."⁵⁵ The point is that the aesthete simply *lets* herself act on whatever motive happens to gain the upper hand. Thus "the aesthetic in a man is that by which he is immediately what he is."⁵⁶ Here the 'immediate' means roughly the same as first-order preferences and dispositions in Frankfurt's sense. The Judge gives the following example:

The aesthetic choice is either entirely immediate and to that extent no choice, or it loses itself in the multifarious. Thus when a young girl follows the choice of her heart, this choice, however beautiful it may be, is in the strictest sense no choice, since it is entirely immediate.⁵⁷

'Following one's heart' in this sense is essentially *wanton*, lacking in the higher-order volitional movement of intrapersonal identification. No matter how much it is celebrated in German romanticism, this simulacrum of choice—'impulse without incorporation'—does not involve one in full moral responsibility, or "mature one's personality."⁵⁸

The Judge also anticipates Frankfurt by noting that deliberation does not by itself supply the *act of will* which is missing in the wanton's lack of authentic identification with the impulse acted on. He says to the aesthetic young man, "Yea, if to deliberate were the proper task for a human life, you would be pretty close to perfection."⁵⁹ To be capable of *good or evil*, "...the crucial thing is not deliberation but baptism of the will which lifts up the choice into the ethical."⁶⁰ Thus in the nearby passage (quoted at the beginning of this section) in which the Judge distinguishes between "choosing to will" itself and the moral value of a particular volition, he is referring to this movement which first "lifts" us into the higher-order of volitional personality required for choice 'in the strict sense.' When one chooses to will in the ethically relevant sense, one chooses to identify. This same meaning is apparent when the Judge says of the person "who would define his life task ethically" (i.e. as *good or evil*),

...in making a choice it is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses. Thereby the personality announces its inner infinity, and thereby, in turn, the personality is consolidated. Therefore, even if a man were to choose the wrong, he will nevertheless discover, precisely by reason of the energy with which he chose, that he has chosen the wrong. For the choice being made with the whole inwardness of his personality, his nature is purified...⁶¹

In this context, it is clear that the "earnestness" and "pathos" characteristic of *good or evil* choice do not signify mere intensity of emotion (which a first-order preference can exhibit), but rather that the choice unequivocally associates the *inward self* with the content chosen. "Personality" in this sense thus means what Frankfurt also calls 'the person,' i.e. the inward self that identifies the 'I' with the sort of outward or social self it wills to express in its actions. If this is what is required for choice to yield moral responsibility, it makes sense that in such choice, "the I chooses itself—or rather, receives itself,"⁶² or acquires an inward identity. This "personality" cannot itself remain unaffected in morally responsible choice, because authentic identification *constitutes* this personality: "The choice itself is decisive for

the content of personality, through the instant of choice the personality immerses itself in the thing chosen.⁶³ Thus the Judge denies that the personality is a transcendental 'x' or pure subject of action, i.e. that "personality mean[s] nothing more than to be a kobold, which takes part, indeed, in the movements, but nevertheless remains unchanged."⁶⁴ The wanton, who lacks "personality," is like the kobold: an unchanging monad moving through the chaotic alteration of his first-order impulses to act.

The sense of intrapersonal identification involved in the inward personality won through choice_e is apparent in the Judge's implication that this personality *belongs to the chooser in a special sense, in which we cannot likewise say that the aesthete's own deliberate activities belong to him.* Unlike a person's history, which is "not merely a product of his own free actions," the "inward work" of choice "belongs to him and must belong to him unto all eternity."⁶⁵ It is 'incorporated' or appropriated as his own. By contrast, the Judge argues that the aesthetic hedonist "always posits a condition which either lies outside the individual or is in the individual in such a way that it is not posited by the individual himself."⁶⁶ As before, "positing" here means incorporating; and thus even when his preference or desire is "in him" in the sense that it would count as an 'interior' source of human action, he does not 'choose' or *identify* with this desire as the one he intends to be his first-order will: it is "his" only in the way that his external history is his: i.e. simply by being part of his contingent first-order affectivity. Thus the condition for the aesthete's happiness is *external to his self* in the same underlying sense, whether his goal is a purely exterior one, such as beauty, or an interior one, such as the development of a talent.⁶⁷

Like Frankfurt, then, Kierkegaard's Judge holds that having a *self*, or being a person capable of moral responsibility, depends primarily on a special sort of *intrapersonal* volitional relation, which is *prior* to all interpersonal (Hegelian) dependencies.⁶⁸ The primordial choice between the aesthetic and the ethical is about the initiation of this intrapersonal relation:

So the either/or I propose is in a sense absolute, for it is a question of choosing or not choosing. But since the choice is an absolute choice, so is the either/or absolute; in another sense, however, it is only by this choice [that] the either/or comes to evidence, for with that [the choice_e, between choosing, and not choosing,] the choice between good and evil makes its appearance.⁶⁹

It is apparent here that the objective authority of ethical principles does not originate with the absolute choice_e, but rather "comes to evidence" and "makes its appearance"—these phrases refer to the newfound personal *significance* of the objective authority in ethical principles. Although the aesthete may already have been cognizant of their universally binding force, they apply directly to identifying volitions, which the aesthete lacks. He is

in the same position relative to these principles as someone who knows the rules of the road, but never drives. When that someone nervously decides to take the driver's seat for the first time, however, their decision does not *create* whatever authority they recognize in the traffic laws. Similarly, the person who makes the primordial choice_e to begin making 'incorporative', identifying choices is not *grounding* the binding normative force of ethical precepts, but giving these precepts *subjective* application within their own will, or giving them personal relevance.

IV. Existential Choice:

Kierkegaard's Route Between Aristotle and Kant

In these findings, we have recognized the crucial importance of Kantian "incorporation" or identification in Kierkegaardian choice. We should not, however, assume that Kierkegaard conceives "the ethical" and choice in purely Kantian terms. Kierkegaard's theme of the practical significance of the eternal from an individual perspective derives from Socrates, while his conception of choice is indebted to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Ironically for MacIntyre, Kierkegaard scholars writing both before and since *After Virtue* have emphasized the close connections between Kierkegaard's notion of choice and Aristotle's conception of *praitesis*.⁷⁰ In 1977, over three years prior to MacIntyre's critique of Kierkegaard, George Stack published a lengthy treatment of "Existential Choice"⁷¹ in which he argues that since Kierkegaard's conception is largely derived from Aristotle, it is neither arbitrary nor irrationalist.⁷² The fundamental similarity is found in the fact that Kierkegaard emphasizes "the distinction between relatively insignificant 'choices' and existential choices... that have relevance for the development of the character of the individual."⁷³ Deliberation, as we have seen, is *aesthetic* if it never gets beyond what Stack calls *intellectual possibilities*, or detached speculation about logical possibilities. Deliberation becomes *ethical* (related to 'choice' in the true sense) for Kierkegaard—as for Aristotle—only when it is about what we might call *personal possibilities* of action: "For Kierkegaard, as for Aristotle, we deliberate not about the eternal, the necessary, or the impossible, but about that possible (*dunaton*) or that which we believe to be within our power to perform."⁷⁴ To be ethical, deliberation must be about *practical* possibilities of action rather than about 'disinterested' logical possibilities, but even then it is not by itself sufficient for action, and must terminate in a choice.⁷⁵ As we read in the *Postscript*, there is a "twilight zone" between mere *thought* or aesthetic deliberation, and action in the fully incorporative sense:

Thus when I think that I will do this or that, this thought is not yet an action, and in all eternity it is qualitatively distinct from an action; nevertheless, it is a possibility in which the *interest* of action and of reality already reflects itself.⁷⁶

Stack expresses this by saying that to make an ethical choice, "the individual must be passionately concerned with his own possibilities for choice, decision, and action."⁷⁷ On this basis, he argues that what Aristotle means by practical deliberation just is what Kierkegaard means by real ethical choice: "...there is what might be called a concerned deliberation about one's own possibilities. Concernful deliberation (as opposed say, to the neutral or indifferent deliberations of the aesthete...) is tantamount to Aristotle's notion of deliberation (*bouleusis*)."⁷⁸

Passages like the one just cited from the *Postscript* show that Stack is largely right that for Kierkegaard, ethical existence is choice in the sense of closure of practical deliberation on 'live' options with substantive ethical qualities (beyond merely justice or injustice). But for all this, Stack's analysis does not help to explain the primordial Kierkegaardian choice, the "first 'movement' of the self (or, more accurately, the potential self)...in choosing to realize the possibility of choice,"⁷⁹ which gives our possible actions their 'live' personal relevance in the first place. It is just at this point that Kierkegaard goes beyond the Aristotelian and Thomistic accounts of choice, through bringing in a Kantian insight: the personal relevance necessary for a choice involving moral responsibility does *not* arise simply from the fact that the choice is *practical*, i.e. about possible actions of the agent; rather, it arises from the possibility of *identifying* with the intelligible intention involved in an action. It is this higher possibility that the primordial choice to be a chooser, adds.

For Aristotle, this question is masked because identification is just built into "choice" that expresses a virtuous or vicious character. Since virtues are dispositions to *choose* in a particular way, they are implicitly something different than merely acting *on habit*. But because they misinterpret the latter as similar to involuntary motions that would not count as deliberate 'human actions' at all, Aristotleans conclude that it is reflection with an 'interest' in some end that differentiates choice from habit. On their account, then, identification is implicitly constituted by some relation of reason and desire, whereas Kierkegaard recognizes that identification is a further irreducibly volitional element. Thus I cannot completely agree with Stack that

The Aristotelian notion that *proairesis* is either reason served by desire...or desire served by reasoning...is one that underlies Kierkegaard's conception of choice despite his tendency to exaggerate the role of 'passion' in choice.⁸⁰

In ethically significant choice, Kierkegaard has in mind the *same phenomenon* as Aristotle does when he discusses the decision that is part of *phronesis* or practical deliberation. But Kierkegaard, following Kant, recognizes that the personal commitment of self involved in this phenomenon cannot be explained by any combination of 'disinterested' reasoning and 'interested'

desire alone: a further volitional qualification, which comes directly from the individual, is required. So Kierkegaard's conception of existential choice is neither purely Aristotelian nor purely Kantian: it is a new synthesis.

For the same reason, I cannot completely agree with Anthony Rudd, who has also argued that Kierkegaard is a virtue theorist whose conception of ethical choice is "Aristotelianism, without the Aristotelian conception of the single specifiable *telos* of human nature as such."⁸¹ Rudd insightfully points out that for Kierkegaard's Judge, to have ethical *continuity* (a chief theme of *Either/Or II*) one must have "ground projects" (in Bernard Williams's sense) that "give one's life at least some aspect of secure narrative structure."⁸²

But this means accepting that the project confers an identity on oneself, which means rejecting, or at least qualifying, the disengaged idea of the pure autonomous self, distinct from all social roles, relationships, and commitments.⁸² It is true that in Kierkegaard's later ethical writings, such as *Stages on Life's Way*, the ethical agent is engaged in 'thick' phenomena of interpersonal ethical life.⁸³ Moreover, his ethical agent is personally engaged—Kierkegaard has learned from Aristotle's Socratic insight that ethics is about first-person motivation, and therefore concerns the 'personal horizon' of possibilities for action with which character and choice are bound up. But Kierkegaard sees a decisive internal differentiation *within* this 'personal world' (as I call it): although all its contents have 'interest' for agency, since they are salient as 'relevant for deliberate action,' some of them, such as social roles and communal practices, can be engaged in *without real inward commitment*, or first-personal identification. And Kierkegaard finds the basis of this differentiation in precisely the Kantian freedom that Rudd, MacIntyre, and Williams believe can only "abstract" and "disengage" the agent. For Kierkegaard, precisely the opposite is true: it is only the freedom of pure self-commitment that makes it possible for the varied phenomena of social life to gain real first-personal significance in the first place.

These observations explain that seeming paradox that Kierkegaard typically focuses on rich ethical phenomena concretely significant to the "existing individual"—and in this way he looks like Williams and even Aristotle—while he also heaps scorn on mere *aesthetic* 'role-playing' and holds that personal identity involves in a power to 'choose oneself' that is prior to outward social identity and not exhausted by any intersubjective constitution, however rich—and in this way Kierkegaard looks more like Kant, or even Sartre.

This new synthesis was not an accidental conglomeration, however. Rather, it is likely that Kierkegaard developed his theory of the radical existential choice to become an ethical 'chooser' in order to resolve a crucial Hegelian objection to Kant's ethics. As Robert Pippin explains, this famous

objection is that Kantian ethics is "rigoristic" and cannot take into account "the inevitably interested and individual character of our relation to any principle of action."⁸⁴ In the case of norms or objective reasons for acting, what Pippin refers to as "their possibly being mine (their motivating power)"⁸⁵ involves something particular to the agent: to have subjective force, the norms must acquire the *alterity* inherent in first-personal possession.⁸⁶

Against this, the Judge's primordial choice shows how the *individualized* Kantian act of incorporation or identification itself bridges this gap between the universal but abstract normativity of ethical principles and the creation of first-personal, subjective *obligation* in the life of real flesh-and-blood agents. This response to Hegel works equally well against similar contemporary criticisms of Kantian ethics, such as Bernard Williams's suggestion that "The Kantian emphasis on moral impartiality... provide[s] ultimately too slim a sense in which any projects are mine at all."⁸⁷ The proper Kierkegaardian response is that universal impartiality and impersonality are not identical; *first-person universal* motivation is possible, and the primordial choice_p to be a chooser_e shows precisely how it is possible: it allows the objective authority of universal norms to come alive within the agent's irreducibly first-personal volition.

Of course it goes without saying that if Kierkegaard's Judge has an answer to Williams and Hegel, then the contemporary relevance of *Either/Or* is far greater than has been appreciated. If this analysis is right, then we must also regard MacIntyre's evaluation of Kierkegaard with a heightened sense of irony. For while he alleges that Kierkegaard makes the objective authority of norms depend on radical choice, MacIntyre also criticizes Kantian enlightenment rationalism for failing to show how to link objective normativity and subjective obligation for real-existing individuals. The irony is that the Judge's account of radical choice between the aesthetic and the ethical is actually an answer to the *latter* problem, and not about the question of whether the categorical imperative or some other rational basis can ground the authority of ethical principles. Not only does Kierkegaard's conception *not* fall into the aporia of externalism; it even resolves one of the main objections against the consistency of Kantian negative liberty and metaethical internalism.

In sum, the Kierkegaardian primordial either/or shows how metaethical internalism is vindicated in an individual life: with the choice_p to choose_e, objective ethical principles, including (but not limited to) duties derived from 'pure practical reason,' become motivating in the wholly *first-personal* context. Of course, negative liberty implies that the objectivity of ethical reasons is never *determining* even for the person who chooses under strong moral responsibility: although ethical principles whose validity she

is aware of will have first-personal significance for her, she may nevertheless identify herself with dispositions that are evil, or with desires that violate her duties. Yet—and this is the central point—it is the *very choice* to acquire an inward, higher-order personality that brings the normative force of ethical principles into an individual life in such a way that *personal evil* of character is possible in the first place.

Thus it is helpful to think of the choice_p to enter "the ethical" as the generalized decision to identify with a *life plan* or stable pattern of first-order motivations that will give an intersubjectively intelligible meaning to one's whole life. But of course it is possible that from the outside, someone might interpret the activities of a wanton in terms of a life plan they appear to pursue. What concerns the Judge, however, is that individuals take a stand with their innermost being towards a life plan they *will* to adopt as their own—even if it is not initially a very admirable life plan:

That which is prominent in my either/or is the ethical. It is therefore not yet a question of the choice of something in particular, it is not a question of the reality of the thing chosen, but of the reality of the act of choice.⁸⁸

In abstraction from the rightness or wrongness of particular higher-order acts of identification, the primordial choice emphasizes the *general* 'subjectivizing' conversion in the *significance* of objective standards of goodness and duty which identification brings about.⁸⁹

V. 'Bad Faith' and the Primordial 'Duty' to Choose the Ethical

With this Frankfurtian analysis, we have seen that the Judge's ultimate either/or does not contemplate any subjective constitution of the authority of ethical principles. This does seem to leave one remaining doubt: if authentic identification is necessary for moral responsibility, then it looks as if one might not be *morally responsible* for choosing (or failing to choose) "the ethical," i.e. for converting (or not converting) from being a 'wanton' to being a 'person' in Frankfurt's sense. But in fact, the account given by Kierkegaard's Judge is designed to ensure that we do not make this mistake.

In characterizing his challenge to the young man, the Judge says, "one either has to live aesthetically or one has to live ethically. In this alternative, as I have said, there is not yet in the strictest sense a choice."⁹⁰ Given my analysis, this seems to imply that we are not morally responsible for whatever choice we make in the primordial either/or, since this is not a 'choice' in the 'strictest sense.' But in fact, according to the Judge, authentic identification and moral responsibility is lacking only when the choice_p is *tacit* and hidden for one who by default chooses_p the aesthetic—i.e. one who 'by default' is choosing to live 'by default.' The choice_p to be an ethical

chooser, however, cannot be merely tacit, for by definition it has a cognitive element—it requires us to *think* of ourselves as agents capable of ‘strong’ morally responsibility. This is a position we cannot automatically grow into for Kierkegaard. As Stephen Dunning notes, the Judge argues later in the “Equilibrium” letter that we must *repent* of the aesthetic to move into the ethical: “Thus ethical self-choice is a conscious repudiation of the abstraction and autonomy of the aesthetic stage.”⁹¹

This point is crucial, because the Judge is very clear that once the choice_p has become *explicit*, either through despair of the aesthetic life or through the therapeutic of an existential critique (like the one he is personally addressing to the aesthetic young man), then a *primordial responsibility* to choose the ethical category is manifest even in the originary choice between the aesthetic and ethical. To make this choice ‘explicitly’ is to make it in the manner of a cognitively informed higher-order volition, an *identification*. Thus the Judge tells the young man that his purpose is to “bring you to the point where the choice between good and evil acquires significance for you,” i.e. to the point where the unavoidability of the primordial choice is explicit.⁹² If one openly *faces* this primordial either/or, then one will be brought to the point where “the necessity of [ethical] choice is manifest.”⁹³ In other words, *because* a primordial responsibility already exists when the primordial choice-situation is explicit, a person will recognize the moral necessity of choosing_e, i.e. of choosing to make ethically significant choices. To this account the Judge adds a *further* more controversial hypothesis: if he can get a person to recognize their primordial duty to become a person responsible for their own character by getting them to stand “at the crossways” where the primordial choice is explicit, then he believes the person will choose the ethical.⁹⁴

To his credit, MacIntyre realizes that the Judge believes that “anyone who faces the choice between the aesthetic and the ethical will in fact choose the ethical.”⁹⁵ This idea, which has Pascal’s Wager as its inspiration, points to the fact that the primordial choice has a *pedagogical* rather than *justificatory* significance for Kierkegaard. Unfortunately, MacIntyre dismisses the Judge’s conviction on the strength of the following alleged counterexample: ...the aesthetic can be chosen seriously, although the burden of choosing it can be as passion-ridden as that of choosing the ethical. I think of those young men of my father’s generation who watched their own earlier ethical principles die along with the death of their friends in the trenches in the mass murder of Ypres and the Somme, and who returned determined that nothing was ever going to matter to them again...⁹⁶

The honest urgency of this objection is clear, but we must note that MacIntyre is describing men who *gave up* the ethical after already living in

it. The Judge has an answer to this concern: “he who after the ethical has manifested itself to him chooses the aesthetic is not living aesthetically, for he is sinning and is subject to ethical determinants....”⁹⁷ Kierkegaard is wholly consistent on this point: once the personal significance of the authority of ethical principles is accepted, their authority can only be rejected in sinful despair that fails to undo their personal relevance.

This is true not only for persons who have already chosen_p the ethical and confront the primordial choice again when trying to maintain ethical ideals becomes painful enough to require infinite resignation; it is also true for persons who confront this choice_p for the first time. If the necessity of choosing the ethical is “evident” in the primordial choice-situation itself when that choice_p has become explicit, then even if the Judge’s further hypothesis proves false, and the young man facing this choice tries to hurl himself back into the aesthetic, this would be a *sinful* choice in the presence of moral obligation, not an arbitrary choice without reason. Because the primordial moral responsibility intervenes when choice_p becomes explicit, trying to return to the aesthetic can only lead to a form of sin, not to one’s original state: as Stack remarks, “Once an individual has made such an ‘absolute’ choice he has already made an ethical ‘turn’ even in his deliberate choice to exclude the notions of good and evil.”⁹⁸

Thus we have answered MacIntyre’s remaining objection: for Kierkegaard’s Judge, the choice of whether to become an ethical chooser to whom the categories of moral worth apply is *itself* a choice involving ‘strong moral responsibility.’ When this choice is tacit, one always remains in the aesthetic without sinning in doing so. But when the choice becomes explicit, one can only choose the ethical under the requirement to choose it, or reject it in sinful ‘defiance’ under the same requirement.

However, one might still protest that if the primordial choice becomes explicit only by chance, then the origin of moral responsibility for the individual would be abandoned to moral luck. But Kierkegaard realizes that a complex pedagogical process lies behind the ‘making explicit’ of this primordial choice—a process in which the resistance or willingness of the individual does play a role. Although one does not just will to keep oneself unconscious of this choice, or just decide to make it conscious, one can be more or less open to learning the lesson, in interaction with others and experience in society, that aesthetic pursuits can give no security in *eudaimonia* or continuity in one’s being. For Kierkegaard, everyone is *able* to despair of the aesthetic when the normal course of life brings them to a point where the issue at stake in the primordial choice should present itself. In other words, the capacity for this choice to become subjectively explicit is innate or inevitable, but the individual has some control over how long this takes in their life.

But if the aesthete has a hand in determining whether the primordial choice comes to explicit consciousness at some particular juncture, then it turns out that the aesthete's lack of authentic inward personality cannot be pure Frankfurtian 'wantonness' after all, i.e. it cannot be *completely involuntary* wantonness. Rather, the aesthete has a hand in his wantonness because his innermost personal identity consists in the *third-order* will not to have second-order volitions, i.e. a highest-order will to *remain wanton* at the second-order level. This fits with our previous analysis: since choice_p is *about* whether or not to engage authentic identification that consists in second-order volition, the primordial choice refers to a third order of the will—or to an *absolute identification*⁹⁹ even more 'inward' than specific acts of second-order identification and the personality they constitute.

Within the individual, however, this highest-order absolute identification *begins as tacit*; as the most inward part of volitional identity, it exceeds reflective consciousness. But according to the Judge's model, no one can be neutral at this highest level. One's highest-order disposition is *already* either to choose_e aesthetic existence or the reverse. But since the choice_p to engage in ethical choice_e requires a *conversion* in which the highest order will comes explicitly into question, anyone for whom the primordial choice is still tacit is *eo ipso* still in the aesthetic. Therefore MacIntyre construed the choice_p in false terms when he said, "Suppose that someone confronts the choice between [the aesthetic and ethical] *as yet having embraced neither*."¹⁰⁰ We are here asked to suppose something that is not a possibility in the Kierkegaardian scheme: one may not have embraced either ultimate option *explicitly*, but then one is *already* in the aesthetic sphere; if one has faced the choice, then one is either in the sin of defiant lukewarmness or a 'full citizen' in the ethical (with either a good or an evil character).

This analysis brings out the intended *comprehensiveness* in Kierkegaard's theory of the stages of concrete human existence: there is no Archimedean point outside them. The aesthetic is the first existential 'stage' of human existence, the 'default' position, as it were. Thus we cannot think of the aesthete as 'wanton' in *precisely* Frankfurt's sense after all, since for Frankfurt, wantonness means being entirely without inward identification. Despite lacking second-order volitions that would identify him with the first-order intentions of his actions, the aesthete does have a *highest-order* tacit identification, which puts him in a kind of 'bad faith.'

Aesthetic Bad Faith: The Aesthete *tacitly* wills₃ not to have any second-order volitions V₂ with respect to D₁ (the complex of first-order desires and preferences which generate the motives he actually acts on). In other words, he tacitly intends not to take any authentic stance towards with

any of the motives in D₁, in order to *seem* to be nothing more than his contingent first-order character.¹⁰¹

The Judge's recurring insistence that the aesthete cannot be *transparent* or revealed to himself because he does not choose_e points us towards a symptom of this 'bad faith.' His highest-order character, which is a will *not to choose* in the ethical sense, is hidden from him because its tacit purpose is to try to live wholly in the stream of first-order desires and dispositions—to avoid the *recognition* that he is an agent in the higher-order sense.

It is therefore clear why the choice_p which brings about the conversion to the ethical is *asymmetrical* with the aesthetic state of bad faith: the choice_p to choose_e requires an awareness of oneself not only as an agent (as we already said), but as one who has her *highest-order* personality to determine, since choice_p is a choice at that level. When the primordial choice becomes explicit in this way, however, the objective primordial responsibility to choose_p the ethical comes subjectively to bear on it. At this point, one cannot regain the initial aesthetic state. Thus we can summarize Kierkegaard's scheme in terms of the following four steps from the aesthetic to the ethical:

- | (1) Volitional State | Consciousness | Moral Sense |
|---|--|---|
| Aesthetic highest-order will not to identify with any purpose for acting. | Tacit choice _p . | Both the objective duty to become an ethical chooser, and other ethical principle, lack subjective significance. |
| Aesthetic highest-order will, but free to change. | Choice _p has become explicit. | The objective duty to become an ethical chooser acquires subjective force; ethical principles governing virtue/vice have objectivity but still no personal relevance or inward application. |
| Ethical highest-order will, deciding with what values/ purpose to identify oneself. | Choice _p made to choose _e ; choice _e still unsaturated. | Ethical principles governing goodness and evil of the will now have subjective application or significance. |
| Ethical highest-order will; good second-order will, or authentic identification with an end or maxim because of its goodness. | Choice _e to will the good for its own sake. | The subjective relevance of ethical principles now applies directly to the inward character or authentic personality for which the individual is 'strongly responsible'. |

As we have noted along the way, there are alternatives at each step in this progression. A person may try to stave off the despair or the appeal from others which may bring choice, to explicit consciousness; similarly, once they are aware of their power to choose whether or not to care about anything (or to incorporate authentic motivations), they may reject this 'call of primordial conscience' entirely and turn in sin to a defiant higher-order despair; finally, once they have accepted the strong moral responsibility of being an ethical chooser, they may engage in hatred, or identify in volition with an evil end, fully well knowing the vice it implies. But the Judge's discussion suggests that if internalist motivation by norms and precepts is to be compatible with real negative liberty of the will, then these stages must be distinguished, and the resulting distinction between the various perils is also an essential part of the point.

VI. Clarifying the Issue of 'Arbitrariness'

So far, we have seen why the highest-order choice between the aesthetic and the ethical is not arbitrary relative to the objective authority of ethical precepts. This makes possible the Judge's internalist conception of our motivation for choosing_p to be ethical choosers: although this choice is "radical" (since it relates to the highest order of volitional personality) and undetermined by the present state of that personality, it is *not irrational* or groundless.

But MacIntyre's objection also attributes *another* sort of 'arbitrariness' to the Judge's ultimate either/or: namely, the arbitrariness of this choice made at one time relative to the same choice made later. He argues that if I chose a principle for no reason, "if I then chose to abandon the principle whenever it suited me, I would be entirely free to do so."¹⁰² Since the ultimate either/or is interpreted by MacIntyre as a choice prior to any rational source of justification, the implication is that having chosen the ethical, for example, I could just as easily turn back to the aesthetic soon after. If the ethical was chosen 'for no reason,' then that choice is *reversible*, precisely because it was groundless. This kind of reversibility means that later choices are *arbitrary* with respect to earlier ones, since the agent 'starts anew' from nothing each time. This sort of arbitrariness in the *history of choice* is quite different from an arbitrary relation between will and normative reason, although critics of existentialism tend to run them together.¹⁰³ To keep them distinct, I will call the latter 'normative-motivational arbitrariness' (N-M) and the former 'volitional-historical arbitrariness' (V-H).

The charge of V-H arbitrariness (which easily detaches from N-M arbitrariness in popular accounts) is cause for concern, because it has been

so extensively abused by opponents of libertarianism in general, and by critics of existentialism in particular. There are two broad *reductio* strategies that deploy the charge of V-H arbitrariness this way. The first is to argue that existentialism is subject to the same problems as utilitarianism: V-H arbitrariness applies to utilitarian ethical theories because they depend on emotivist conceptions of personal agency and motivation, and since existential choice implies such a conception of agency, it will also imply V-H arbitrariness. Second, critics of negative liberty in general may even argue that a constant availability of alternative logical possibilities for actions entails V-H arbitrariness with all its vices.

In his *The View From Nowhere*, Thomas Nagel adopts this second strategy. He argues that libertarianism leads to an incoherent result: the desire for autonomy includes the sense that

...in acting we ought to be able to determine not only our choices but the inner conditions of those choices... Yet the logical goal of these ambitions is incoherent, for to be really free we would have to act from a standpoint completely outside ourselves, choosing everything about ourselves, including all our principles of choice—creating ourselves from nothing, so to speak.¹⁰⁴

This serves as a kind of caricature for simplistic existentialist conceptions of transcendence, which Nagel criticizes: such ultimate autonomy is "self-contradictory" because "in order to do anything, we must already be something," and thus "we cannot assess and revise or confirm our entire system of thought and judgment from the outside."¹⁰⁵

It is easy to see in this light why Kierkegaard's notion of an absolute choice *suggests* to some readers the impossible claim that the individual starts out as nothing, *between* the ethical and aesthetic 'systems of thought.' But as we have seen, Kierkegaard actually holds that the individual always begins in the aesthetic, and thus has a *kind* of personality already, but *from this position* is nevertheless able to bring about a revolution in the being that is most inwardly 'his own.' Unlike Nagel, Kierkegaard does not assume that if one starts with a personality that creates an 'inside' perspective, it must operate as an inescapable substance definitive of their personal identity: although the young man is an aesthete, limited possibilities of changing his highest-order will are contained in his aesthetic highest-order will itself. Yet, if no element in our personality is unchangeable, how can it constitute an order of personal existence at all? This is the question that still needs to be addressed.¹⁰⁶

Despite the affinities between his work and Kierkegaard's, Harry Frankfurt himself tends to adopt the first type of strategy against Sartrean existentialism. In his essay on "Rationality and the Unthinkable," Frankfurt

argues that utilitarianism requires "bare persons" for whom there are no limits to what is practically possible.¹⁰⁷ But when a person's freedom reaches this extreme, her identity (in the sense of capacity for identification) evaporates:

...suppose that the field of alternatives from which a person may select is not merely extended; suppose that its boundaries are wiped out entirely. In other words, suppose now that every possible course of action is available and eligible for choice [i.e. *personally possible*], including those that would affect the person's preferences themselves. Since he can in that case even alter his own will, it seems that he has to confront the choices he must make without any specific volitional character that is definitively his... A person like this is so vacant of identifiable tendencies and constraints that he will be unable to deliberate or to make conscientious decisions. He may possibly remain capable of some hollow semblance of choice. If he does, however, it will only be by virtue of a vestigial susceptibility to inchoate volitional spasms. And movements of his will of that sort are inherently so arbitrary as to be wholly devoid of authentically personal significance.¹⁰⁸

To avoid the V-H arbitrariness that results from such bare personality, Frankfurt argues, the agent must have a character that guides and gives rational continuity to the history of choices by acquiring and maintaining limitations on what is *feasible* for the agent to choose—i.e. limitations that make some actions "unthinkable" for a person. Frankfurt understands these limitations which allow for "meaningful conceptions of personal integrity" not as "irresistible impulses" or desires for certain kinds of action, but rather as *volitional necessities*¹⁰⁹ of the higher-order will itself.

On this basis, Frankfurt argues that such volitional necessities, rather than existential choice, must be the origin of authentic personality.¹¹⁰

All a decision does is to create an intention; it does not guarantee that the intention will be carried out. This is not simply because the person can always change his mind. Apart from inconstancy of that sort, it may be that energies tending toward action inconsistent with the intention remain untamed and undispersed.¹¹¹

The problem with decisions is that they will be ineffective if they conflict with underlying volitional necessities of the agent, and even without such a conflict, the decisions will be *reversible* if they are not backed up by a volitional necessity that would make the opposite decision ineffective. Thus if existential theories of choice are to avoid V-H arbitrariness, they must not only focus on decisions that can be *effective* in shaping one's inward character; they must also show how choice can be involved in the creation of strong volitional dispositions (or even necessities) that would at least tend to block contrary choices.

VII. Kierkegaardian Volitional Character:

Why Existential Choice is not V-H Arbitrary

Any worthwhile existentialist approach to personhood and moral responsibility—especially one which traces the moral significance of volitional identification to choices made in libertarian freedom—must have an answer to these objections. In this section, I will briefly show not only that Kierkegaard anticipated these difficulties long before any contemporary critics of existentialism, but also that the absolute choice presented in *Either/Or II* is insulated from them by a highly interesting existential theory of character.

For Kierkegaard's Judge, not even the aesthete's 'choices' or actions can be V-H arbitrary, because the existing individual is a living being who *always* (by default or by choice) has a *character* that consists in certain dispositions to act, which make some options more salient for the individual than others. The free choice of an existing individual is embodied in this *existential structure*, which has a kind of inertia of its own. As the Judge remarks immediately after introducing the idea of acquiring an 'inward' self, although this involves a choice between *logically* possible alternatives, the alternatives are never *synthetically* symmetric in their availability for the individual:

For an instant it is so, for an instant it may seem as if the things between which a choice is to be made lie outside the chooser, that he stands in no relationship to it, that he can preserve a state of indifference over against it... [But in fact] That which has to be chosen stands in the deepest relationship to the chooser, and when it is a question of a choice involving a life problem the individual must naturally be living in the meantime, and hence, it comes about that the longer he postpones the choice the easier it is for him to alter its character... One sees, then, that the inner drift of personality leaves no time for thought experiments, that it constantly hastens onward and in one way or another posits this alternative or that, making the choice more difficult the next instant because [to choose the other alternative] what has thus been posited must be revoked.¹¹²

In this widely-overlooked passage, Kierkegaard's Judge makes clear that the "personality" of the individual always *already* takes us more towards some of the options in a given situation, and thus if we wish to act on another option, we must decisively identify with it. Otherwise we will find that we have almost automatically 'chosen'—but without really choosing—the option towards which our dispositions tended. Thus someone who tries not to decide nevertheless acts as if they had made a choice.¹¹³

Our analysis of Kierkegaard's 'ethical' choice in terms of authentic identification in Frankfurt's sense can help us understand the idea at work

here. The Judge's point is that we always already have a *first-order* will, or outward character of motivations we will act on; like Frankfurt's wanton, we are thus led to act in one way rather than another in a new circumstance: "the personality is already interested in the choice before one chooses."¹¹⁴ Notice that 'wantonness' or failure to engage in authentic identification is not inconsistent with such dispositional continuity in first-order character: on the contrary, wildly shifting and chaotic changes in first-order will are rare indeed (except possibly among adolescents). However, through an authentic inward will to act on one sort of motive rather than another, the individual not only for the first time acquires an inward personality that is good or evil (and thus makes an 'ethical' choice): she attempts to *direct* the 'outward' character she acts on, in spite of its own 'drift,' by *aligning* herself with one kind of character over another. In this task, as the Judge says, *time* is connected to choice, because without such inward direction, the more one continues to act on one kind of motive, the disposition for it becomes further entrenched. Judge William illustrates this by figuring the individual and his "personality" as a "captain on his ship." The captain must remember that he is turning a thing with inertia of its own, and if he simply fails to turn it, it is "all the while making its usual headway" and will end up in one place rather than another.¹¹⁵

Although Kierkegaard does not sufficiently clarify this point, we must distinguish such 'inertia' in first-order character from the character of the 'inward' personality that is good or evil. The inward self of one who chooses_p to choose, is no more "a blank"¹¹⁶ that begins anew each time than is their outward character; rather, the inward personality consists in dispositions of *identification* itself. Thus there are at least three distinct ways in which the free person is *not* an 'externally' neutral arbiter of her options: (1) her outward dispositions *to act* on given desires and incentives creates differences in the availability of options; (2) when she acts, she either reinforces or tends to alter the shape and strength of these dispositions; (3) if she does authentically choose to act on certain incentives and desires rather than others (for the sake of some good or evil higher-order motive), then she also shapes the dispositions of her *inward* personality, which will incline future authentically identifying choices. Thus over time, the structure of one's personality as a whole, inward and outward, is affected by both authentic choice and failure to choose. The distinction between the 'levels' is important, because for Kierkegaard, real *virtues* and *vices* will be dispositions of the inward personality, or dispositions of *choosing*_e in the incorporative sense.

This is important not only because it shows that there is a place for the

notion of virtue *within* the existentialist conception of authenticity, but also because it distinguishes volitional character that makes virtue *and* vice possible from the mere aestheticism of *first-order* habit. As we have seen, the Kantian side of Kierkegaard's existentialism includes a critique of living by disposition in the immediate habitual sense, or letting 'outward' character take its course. But, *pace* his unsympathetic critics, Kierkegaard *does not* thereby exclude all notions of character. The synthesis in *Either/Or* shows how to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic dispositions, and it turns out that authentic choice is actually impossible without the acquisitions of dispositions of the *higher* undissociable kind, which constitute the authentic character.

That authentic identification itself must have a dispositional structure becomes clear when the Judge emphasizes that the inward self of the ethical chooser is *not* V-H arbitrary, or reversible. Aesthetic deliberation and choice among a "multiplicity" of options remains in the category of 'immediacy' or outward character,

...because the self-determining factor in the choice is not ethically accentuated, and because when one does not choose absolutely [i.e. choose_e] one chooses only for the moment, and therefore can choose something different the next moment.¹¹⁷

Choice that is 'ethically accentuated' involves *identification*—an association of the self with some way of acting—that establishes an inward character, which would not even exist if it were 'bare' and immediately reversible. In fact, it is even *less* reversible than one's outward immediate dispositions. To make this contrast with the *inward character* acquired by "choosing absolutely," the Judge even rhetorically contradicts his earlier assertion that the outward or immediate personality has some consistency or inertia. Whereas the limitations on salience imposed by outward dispositions may still leave a multiplicity of options, the possession of inward dispositions to identify or choose_e, which bring strong moral responsibility and the subjective relevance of norms with them, more sharply limit the relevant options,¹¹⁸ and ground choices that are *much less* reversible than outward dispositions to act. A Chillingworth or Napoleon who is intent on his malign purpose with the demonic steadiness of an inwardly evil will is far less easily swayed from his path than, say, a Schindler who is addicted to material and sexual pleasures. Thus although it is so often used as a critique against existentialist freedom, V-H arbitrariness is precisely what Kierkegaard's conception of personality and the primordial choice is designed to avoid.

In fact, an even stronger claim is implicit in the Judge's discussion:

choice that has the consequence of 'strong moral responsibility,' or potential moral culpability of the will, would not even be *possible* if the individual were not asymmetrically connected to his options through dispositions. Right after the passage (cited earlier) where he calls for the "baptism of the will" by choice that lifts it into full moral responsibility, the Judge declares that:

The longer the time that elapses, the more difficult it is to choose, for the soul is constantly attached to one side of the dilemma, and it becomes more and more difficult, therefore, to tear oneself loose. And yet this is necessary if one is to choose and is therefore of the utmost importance if a choice is to signify something.¹¹⁹

In other words, if 'ethical' choices were arbitrarily reversible—if it were not at least more difficult (if not impossible) to become a bachelor once one has taken a wedding vow, for example¹²⁰—then there would be no choice in Kierkegaard's strict sense at all, because choices would not establish the kinds of inward volitional characters, or dispositions of identification, that are the *only* things capable of being absolutely evil or good.¹²¹ Hence if the absolute ethical either/or has any application, then choice must *both affect and be affected* by inward character in such a way that it *alters* the availability of options, and thus is not *arbitrarily* reversible.

This transcendental argument is the basis for all of Kierkegaard's own (non-pseudonymous) treatment of ethical character in his various "edifying" or "upbuilding" discourses. It is confirmed in a somewhat different context in the *Sickness Unto Death*, where Kierkegaard carefully distinguishes between the "own self" which the ethically responsible person chooses to "put on," and the purely abstract "infinite form, the negative self," which the demonic man in his most absolute despair wills to be.¹²² In the self of *purely* negative freedom—the self of an individual who consciously *refuses* to authentically adopt any inward personality, and instead explicitly maintains the highest-order will to reject all authentic identification¹²³—there can be "nothing steadfast" despite the grandeur of his plans, because every decision he makes lacks earnestness and commitment and so is reversible: "The negative form of the self exercises a loosening as well as a binding power; at any time it can quite arbitrarily start all over again."¹²⁴ By contrast, the ethical choice, which Kierkegaard characterizes here in terms of "infinite resignation," cannot turn around and "arbitrarily dissolve the whole thing into nothing."¹²⁵ Ethical choices such as infinite resignation can never be arbitrarily reversible.

VIII. Conclusion

We have now seen that in the "Equilibrium" letter of *Either/Or* II, what Kierkegaard means by authentic choice is closely bound up with a form of inward character that rules out V-H arbitrariness as thoroughly as the primordial choice rules out N-M arbitrariness. Choice in the sense of authentic identification, which alone can establish strong moral responsibility, not only has nothing to do with establishing the objective authority of norms; it must also *exist* in the form of character that is inward but not *noumenal*, a character with a history that reciprocally affects and is shaped by the will to identify with moral and immoral motives of action. This characterological facticity ensures that especially in the case of inward volitional identification with one's action-maxims, no choice is arbitrarily reversible.

Once this is recognized, Frankfurt's and Nagel's objections against existentialist autonomy are answered. Kierkegaard adheres to the Kantian idea of spontaneity in choice, but where Kant contrasts the phenomenal actor in a net of psychological forces with a structureless and unschematizable noumenal will, Kierkegaard contrasts the inertia of immediate character with an inward volitional pattern, or process of identification, that *itself* has a history and a 'depth' of synthetic constraints. Even spontaneous choice, then, is clothed in such a way that it is *never* utterly 'characterless' self-creation *ex nihilo*. Absolute choice as *identification* always brings a personality into existence by actualizing an option that is accessible or personally possible because of the outward or inward character *already* 'there': as the Judge says,

For in case what I chose did not exist but absolutely came into existence with the choice, I would not be choosing. I would be creating; but I do not create myself, I choose myself.¹²⁶

In sum, this analysis shows that several traditional critiques of existentialism cannot apply to Kierkegaard, and are therefore only questionably applied to everyone Kierkegaard influenced. Those who would 'demythologize' existentialism as a myth of atomistic individualism or decisionistic moral relativism themselves stand demythologized. The implications of this conclusion go well beyond a mere corrective in our interpretations of Kierkegaard. For it shows that, far from revealing the *failure* of the Enlightenment Project, Kierkegaard has gone a long way towards showing how to make the Enlightenment combination of negative liberty and metaethical internalism *succeed*. The new possibilities *Either/Or* opens up have hardly yet been explored. They depend in large measure on Kierkegaard's unique way of synthesizing the medieval conception of

substantive moral character with freedom as negative liberty, while retaining objective moral standards of right action and ethical norms applying to volitional character. MacIntyre is therefore wrong not only about the meaning and implications of Kierkegaard's primordial choice between the aesthetic and the ethical; his description of Kierkegaard's position in the history of ethics is also the reverse of the truth.

Notes

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Second Edition (University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, 1984), 39.

² MacIntyre, 41.

³ MacIntyre, 40. ⁴ MacIntyre, 41.

⁵ MacIntyre, 43.

⁶ MacIntyre, 42.

⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Volume II, tr. Walter Lowrie (Princeton University Press, 1944, 1972), 178-179. All references to this volume will be to the Lowrie translation.

⁸ *Either/Or* II, 178. He describes this solemn choice as an "inward work" of the sort that makes up "the genuine life of freedom," but he distinguishes "genuine positive freedom" from "*liberum arbitrium*" (178). We should also recall that Kierkegaard wrote this part of *Either/Or* during the winter he spent in Berlin, during which he attended Schelling's lectures (see Lowrie's Introduction, xv), which would not have encouraged him to believe that spontaneity is *noumenal* in Kant's sense. As the Judge says, although "an either/or presents itself in the case of an individual who must act" (179), he does not understand such practical choice in terms of "formal, abstract freedom" (182).

⁹ MacIntyre, 40.

¹⁰ MacIntyre, 42-43.

¹¹ Timothy Jackson, "Kierkegaard's Metatheology," *Faith in Philosophy*, 4:1 (January, 1987), 71-72.

¹² Jackson, 72.

¹³ Thus after describing the absolute either/or between the aesthetic and the ethical, MacIntyre compares it to Kierkegaard's argument, in the *Philosophical Fragments*, that a "radical and ultimate choice" explains "how one becomes a Christian." This idea, he says, not only militates against Hegel, but "destroys the whole tradition of rational moral culture" (41). Thus MacIntyre in so many words charges Kierkegaard's *Fragments* with a fideism that is directly contrary to Kant's rationally grounded moral faith.

¹⁴ This is the second of the Judge's three letters contained within *Either/Or* II, and it is near the beginning of this letter that the Judge introduces and expands on his idea of the choice between the aesthetic and the ethical.

¹⁵ For MacIntyre, in fact, it is clear that Kierkegaard is as much an "emotivist" as Sartre: there is no essential difference between the Judge's response to the aesthetic 'young man' of *Either/Or* I and Sartre's critique of the French bourgeoisie "who cannot tolerate the recognition of their own choices as the sole source of moral judgment" (*After Virtue*, 22).

¹⁶ Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's Analysis of Obligation: The Argument of *Foundations I*," *The Monist*, 72:3 (July, 1989), 312.

¹⁷ Korsgaard, 311.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Korsgaard, 312. Korsgaard footnotes this to Clark's "A Discourse Concerning the Unalterable Obligations of Natural Religion..." from *The Works of Samuel Clarke* (Garland Publishing, 1978), 609-10.

²⁰ MacIntyre, 47. I should also note that, for reasons partially presented in §IV, I doubt that Kierkegaard does entirely agree with Kant's ethics, as MacIntyre claims. Kierkegaard is open to non-formalist accounts of the good and virtue, as long as they come with the right conception of volition and choice.

²¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, tr. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton University Press, 1941, 1971 printing), Part Two, ch. I, "Becoming Subjective," 121.

²² I leave the notion of normativity open in this description, because as I have suggested, for Kierkegaard (unlike Kant) metaethical internalism need not imply *deontological, formalist* definitions of the right and the good. Medieval virtue theories also had internalist conceptions of virtuous motivation.

²³ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, tr. Theodore Greene and Hoyt Hudson, with introductory essays by Theodore Greene and John Silber (Harper & Row, 1960).

²⁴ Although the Judge rejects the *atemporal* abstractness of Kant's noumenal self, on the first page of the "Equilibrium" letter, he follows Kant in saying: "...there is only one situation in which either/or has absolute significance, namely, when truth, righteousness and holiness are lined up on one side, and lust and base propensities are lined up on the other side..." *Either/Or* II, 161.

²⁵ Kant, *Religion*, 47.

²⁶ It is a measure of the strength of Kant's *insistence* on good works and moral progress for eschatological salvation that John Silber even felt that Kant's theory is inimical to any adequate notion of divine forgiveness or mercy (Silber, cxxxi). I am not sure if this is a fair criticism of Kant, but it certainly indicates the strength of his emphasis on morality as an essential element of religiousness.

²⁷ Although as Silber rightly points out, Kierkegaard opposed Kant's belief that strong 'demonic' evil is impossible for human beings (*Religion*, cxxix).

²⁸ See in particular Walter Lowrie's Introduction to *Attack Upon Christendom* (Princeton University Press, 1968), xvii. The title of *Works of Love* is also meant to emphasize this point.

²⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, tr. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1984), 27; my italics.

³⁰ *Fear and Trembling*, 47.

³¹ *Either/Or* II, 170: "Whenever in a stricter sense there is [a] question of an either/or, one can always be sure that the ethical is involved. The only absolute either/or is the choice between good and evil, but that is also absolutely ethical."

³² *Either/Or* II, 173.

³³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 209.

³⁴ As MacIntyre says, "Human beings can be held to account for that of which they are the authors; other beings cannot" (209). Yet MacIntyre would at least need to add that a human being is typically *aware* of the intelligibility of her action

under terms referring to her own intentions at the time of enacting: the action is *intrapersonally* intelligible.

³⁵ I am relying on Robert Pippin's account of Hegel's debts to Kant's analysis of agency, as described in his "Hegel's Ethical Rationalism," in *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (SUNY Press, 1995—forthcoming). As Pippin says, for both Kant and Hegel, "we know... that actions are those events which are explicable by reference to a subject's reasons for acting, that such reasons always presuppose certain norms for action, and that such norms can be norms only as self-imposed, as conferring value upon a course of action for a subject, and so cannot be understood in what has come to be called some strictly 'externalist' sense" (mss. 198-199). For Kant, however, full moral responsibility involves further conditions of *free incorporation*, which Hegel does not take up.

³⁶ *Either/Or* II, 170-1.

³⁷ For example, when the action is deliberate but done under "duress," or when done deliberately but without control of the act or the 'internal' source it flowed from (see the discussion of the insanity defense in *United States v. Freeman*, U.S. Court of Appeal, Second Circuit, February 1966, 357 F.2d 606). Our distinction between voluntary manslaughter and 'murder one' is based on this same intuition.

³⁸ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, "The Subjective Thinker 2," 302; my italics.

³⁹ And in fact, the *source* of this authority is not at issue at all in the Judge's presentation.

⁴⁰ See Henry A. Allison, "Spontaneity and Autonomy in Kant's Conception of the Self," in *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 1995—forthcoming).

⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Book One, "Observation," 19.

⁴² Kant, *Religion*, 19: "...only thus can an incentive, whatever it may be, coexist with the absolute spontaneity of the will [willkür] (i.e. freedom)."

⁴³ Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LXVIII, No. 1 (January 14, 1971); reprinted in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge University Press, 1988): 11.

⁴⁴ Frankfurt, "The Freedom of the Will," 12.

⁴⁵ Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will," 14. The person's first-order "will" in this sense is similar to the Kantian notion of an *action-maxim* which includes a description of the act to be done and the end or purpose for which it is done. Note that the distinction Frankfurt makes between orders of the will roughly matches the distinction that Korsgaard makes between Kantian "maxims" of different orders (Korsgaard, 324).

⁴⁶ Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will," 17.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ This, of course, is the basis for Frankfurt's controversial claim that causal necessitation (lack of alternative possibilities for action) is not incompatible with moral responsibility for one's actions. One can *identify* in the relevant sense with the motives for an action, even when these impulses would have led to the

performance whether or not one was *unwilling* to have such a first-order will.

⁴⁹ Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will," 18.

⁵⁰ Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will," 17.

⁵¹ Whether or not the "incorporation" which is necessary for moral responsibility requires absolute spontaneity in Kant's sense, it *at least* involves authentic identification in Frankfurt's sense, i.e. the individual's identification with the first-order will he acts on.

⁵² This way of putting the relation of identification helps clarify its relevance for understanding why Kierkegaard's Judge says authenticity involves becoming "transparent to oneself" (*Either/Or* II, 164).

⁵³ *Either/Or* II, 170. ⁵⁴ Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will," 18.

⁵⁵ *Either/Or* II, 163, my italics. ⁵⁶ *Either/Or* II, 182.

⁵⁷ *Either/Or* II, 171. ⁵⁸ *Either/Or* II, 166.

⁵⁹ *Either/Or* II, 169. From 169-170, he imagines this aesthetic thinking through several options for a career and never making a decisive choice, thus remaining what he is by *default*.

⁶⁰ *Either/Or* II, 173. ⁶¹ *Either/Or* II, 171. ⁶² *Either/Or* II, 181.

⁶³ *Either/Or* II, 167. Notice how completely this passage agrees with the definition of inward action given in the quote from the *Postscript* earlier in this section.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Either/Or* II, 179. Compare this to Frankfurt's argument that the unwilling addict, who "identifies himself...through the formation of a second-order volition, with one rather than with the other of his conflicting first-order desires," thus "makes one of them more truly his own and, in so doing, he withdraws himself from the other" ("Freedom of the Will, 18).

⁶⁶ *Either/Or* II, 184.

⁶⁷ This is the argument of *Either/Or* II, 185-187. In technical terms, the point is that 'internality/externality to self' is not equivalent to the 'exterior/interior' Aristotelian contrast.

⁶⁸ Thus the Judge chides the Aesthete as follows: "...your mask is the most enigmatical of all. In fact you are nothing; you are merely a relation to others, and what you are you are by virtue of this relation" (*Either/Or* II, 163). However, as Stephen Dunning argues in his study, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness: A Structural Analysis of the Theory of Stages* (Princeton University Press, 1985), the "ethical resolution" of *Either/Or* II corresponds to the resolution "to be related to the other" as described in "Various Observations" in *Stages on Life's Way* (103). As Dunning notes, while *Either/Or* presents "primarily a dialectic of the inner and outer" (or the intrapersonal relations), Kierkegaard's "In Vino Veritas" and "Various Observations" cover the same stages of the ethical, but "are more concerned with the relation between self and other" (100).

⁶⁹ *Either/Or* II, 182. The bracketed explanatory words are Lowrie's, but I have added my own subscripts to assimilate Lowrie's point more clearly to my analysis.

⁷⁰ In fact one commentator, Anthony Rudd, has argued that Kierkegaard's

conception of the "ethical" parallels MacIntyre's own view that projects "significant enough to give one's life a purpose and meaning" will necessarily involve social interaction and be bound up with institutions and "practices;" see Anthony Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (Oxford University/Clarendon Press, 1993), 94.

⁷¹ George J. Stack, *Kierkegaard's Existential Ethics* (University of Alabama Press, 1977); see chapter three in particular.

⁷² Stack, 92: "Insofar as Kierkegaard's conception of ethical existence appropriated at least some of Aristotle's views concerning the ethical becoming of man this may serve to indicate that two rather common interpretations of Kierkegaard's analysis of choice are basically false[!]:...the assumption that Kierkegaard defends a conception of absolute freedom (à la Sartre) and that he propounds an irrationalist conception of choice."

⁷³ Stack, 95. ⁷⁴ Stack, 93.

⁷⁵ As Stack points out, both Kierkegaard and Aristotle agree that "deliberation can only be brought to an end by a decision to choose or by the actualization of the possibility of choice. Deliberation is the condition for the possibility of choice, but it neither entails nor initiates choice" (93).

⁷⁶ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, "Subjective Thinker 2," 302; my italics. ⁷⁷ Stack, 94. ⁷⁸ Stack, 94-95.

⁷⁹ Stack, 96. ⁸⁰ Stack, 101.

⁸¹ Rudd, 99. There is some truth in this claim, however. Note that it accurately encapsulates Duns Scotus's ethics, which is in some respects the beginning of a line that leads to Kierkegaard.

⁸² Rudd, 93.

⁸³ See footnote 67. ⁸⁴ Pippin, "Hegel's Ethical Rationalism," mss. 200.

⁸⁵ Pippin, "Hegel's Ethical Rationalism," mss. 196.

⁸⁶ As Pippin points out, this objection is deceptively similar to the Humean objection that "no consideration of what an impartial agent, motivated by no motives particular to him, would do, could ever be on its own a motivating factor in action" (mss. 202). Interestingly, however, Pippin resists the common assumption that Hegel's view is a more subtle 'communitarian' version of Hume's in this respect (mss. 203-4).

⁸⁷ Bernard Williams, "Persons, character and morality," reprinted in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge University Press, 1981/1985), 12.

⁸⁸ *Either/Or* II, 180.

⁸⁹ For this reason, the Judge says of the primordial either/or, "That in a sense it is not a question of the choice of a particular something, you will see from the fact that what appears as the alternative is the aesthetical, the indifferent" (*Either/Or* II, 181).

⁹⁰ *Either/Or* II, 172.

⁹¹ Dunning, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*, 78.

⁹² *Either/Or* II, 172. ⁹³ *Either/Or* II, 182.

⁹⁴ This further hypothesis also reflects the ethical optimism characteristic of this pseudonym, which is qualified by the more advanced perspectives of later pseudonyms, such as "Anti-Climacus" in the *Sickness Unto Death*. But as we shall see, the Judge's optimistic hypothesis is in principle dispensable for Kierkegaard. ⁹⁵ MacIntyre, 41. ⁹⁶ MacIntyre, 41.

⁹⁷ *Either/Or* II, 172.

⁹⁸ Stack, 98.

⁹⁹ Compare Heidegger's conception of the person's *ownmost meaning* (*Being and Time*, H178, H187-8, H250-1, H202-3).

¹⁰⁰ MacIntyre, 40; my italics.

¹⁰¹ This formulation of the Aesthetic in Kierkegaard's sense should remind one of Sartre's infamous waiter in the chapter on "Bad Faith" in *Being and Nothingness*. ¹⁰² MacIntyre, 42.

¹⁰³ For example, MacIntyre complains that the existentialist self is a 'ghost' without enduring character who thus lacks any rational basis for ethical choice. The conflation here occurs because MacIntyre understands V-H arbitrariness to be a result of N-M arbitrariness.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, 118.

¹⁰⁵ Nagel, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁶ What I attribute to Kierkegaard in this and the following section is a *partial* resolution of this problem; the full existentialist answer to it will require a theory of laws of volition that is beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁰⁷ Harry G. Frankfurt, "Rationality and the Unthinkable," new in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); 179. Frankfurt borrows the phrase from Rawls, who criticizes utilitarianism for defining persons as "what we may call 'bare persons'" who lack any determinate conceptions of the good which commit them to substantive loyalties (see Rawls, "Social Unity and the Primary Goods").

¹⁰⁸ Frankfurt, *ibid*, 178. It is obvious why MacIntyre's interpretation leads him to think that Kierkegaard's agent must be a bare person: on MacIntyre's account, the Kierkegaardian agent *decides* if his preferences are to be informed by any principles that could limit his possible preferences.

¹⁰⁹ Frankfurt, *ibid*, 178, 182.

¹¹⁰ See in particular his criticism of Sartre's example of the young man deciding whether to fight in a just war or stay at home to care for his mother: "The Importance of What We Care About," reprinted in *The Importance of What We Care About*, 84.

¹¹¹ Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," 174.

¹¹² *Either/Or* II, 167-8.

¹¹³ The meaning of this existentialist claim was altered by Sartre, however, who used it to mean that someone already always has a *highest-order* volition with which they are inwardly identified, or an "original project" as he called it. As we have seen, this idea is also implicit in Kierkegaard's critique of the aesthete.

¹¹⁴ *Either/Or* II, 168.

¹¹⁵ *Either/Or* II, 168.

¹¹⁶ *Either/Or* II, 168.

¹¹⁷ *Either/Or*, II, 171.

¹¹⁸ "He who would define his life task ethically has ordinarily not so consid-

erable a selection to choose from; on the other hand, the act of choice has far more importance for him" (171).

¹²⁰ Kierkegaard's Judge selects marriage as his paradigm of decisive ethical choice in the first letter of *Either/Or* Book II. Clearly, marriage would be meaningless if it entailed no change in oneself which made the option of being unmarried at least *less available* than it was when one was trying to decide whether to propose.

¹²¹ One will recognize here an echo of the first line of chapter one of Kant's *Groundwork*. That is appropriate, because this analysis of will in terms of volitional identification or 'incorporation' both makes clear the meaning Kant had intended in that infamous first line, and why Kierkegaard follows Kant in a view that leads to the same conclusion.

¹²² Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1980), 'In Despair to Will to Be Oneself: Defiance,' 68.

¹²³ Note that this 'defiant' person's will is fundamentally the same in structure as the aesthete's 'bad faith' (as I analyzed it), but with this crucial difference: the highest-order will *not to identify* or authentically care about anything is fully open in the demonic person (in Nietzschean 'amor fati' style), whereas it is only tacit in the aesthete's bad faith. This is important, because it shows not only why the demonic man sins while the ordinary aesthete does not, but also why every aesthete has the potential to become demonic if, when the moment of primordial choice comes, he or she rejects ethical existence.

¹²⁴ *Sickness Unto Death*, 69. Of course the demonic man is responsible for his defiance of the ethical: this is consistent, because his highest-order project is not *itself* V-H arbitrary, even though it is the project of being thoroughly V-H arbitrary in second-order character.

¹²⁵ *Sickness Unto Death*, 70.

¹²⁶ *Either/Or* II, 219-220.

Editorial Policy

Each January issue of the *Southwest Philosophy Review* contains papers presented at the annual meeting of the Southwestern Philosophical Society. Papers in the July issue are selected by the editor, with the advice of the members of the Advisory Board and other referees, from open submissions to the *Review*. Comments on papers previously published in the *Review* are solicited and will be considered for publication.

Book reviews will be considered and books for review are solicited from publishers and authors, with preference for publications by members of the Southwestern Philosophical Society.

Manuscripts should be submitted in triplicate and should conform to MLA or *Chicago Manual of Style* standards with notes gathered at the end. The author's name should appear only on a separate cover page since papers are refereed anonymously. Manuscripts will be returned only if return postage is included.

Upon acceptance of a paper for publication, the author will be requested to provide the editor with a computer diskette holding the file of the manuscript.