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The Virtues of Authenticity: A Kierkegaardian Essay in Moral Psychology

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ABSTRACT: Discussions of the concept of authenticity often fail to define the conditions of an appropriate emotional orientation toward the world. With a more solid philosophical understanding of emotion, it should be possible to define more precisely the necessary conditions of emotional authenticity. Against this background, I interpret Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* as a narrative text that suggests a moral psychology of emotion that points toward the development of a better way of thinking about the ethics of authenticity. In the process, I also engage with the positions of other philosophers, both "existential" and "analytic." The upshot of my argument is that a cognitive phenomenology of emotion can flesh out the ideal of truthfulness as a virtue of character, while forcing moral philosophers to question whether authenticity should be understood as an achievement of the will rather than as a matter of affective receptivity.

1. CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION

It is difficult to speak in clear terms about what "authenticity" could mean. As a result, this topic is all too seldom addressed in analytic moral philosophy. On the other hand, non-analytic discussions of authenticity often draw upon the systematic abstractions of works like *Being and Time* or *Being and Nothingness*, only to get lost in jargon that seems esoterically contemptuous of ordinary life, or else insistently transfixed by the ideal of absolute freedom.¹ And yet the concept is

¹The contrast between inauthentic and authentic life is emphasized by every major existential philosopher, as Walter Kaufmann notes in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: Meridian, 1975) p. 50. Here, I am concerned with Heidegger and Sartre especially. I agree with Daniel Berthold-Bond that Heidegger's account of authenticity is "extraordinarily abstract and formal," defects that might have been avoided if he had given more attention to Kierkegaard's analysis of the aesthetic sphere of existence. See "A Kierkegaardian Critique of Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity," *Man and World* 24 (1991) 120–21. Specifically, by advocating an abstraction from the contexts of social life, Heidegger loses sight of the idea that the authentic individual is ethically responsible in any real world, as Habermas and Poole have also argued. See Jürgen Habermas, "Work and Weltanschauung," trans. John McCumber, *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989) 434–39; and Roger Poole, "The Unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-Century Receptions" in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 53. Against the nihilistic fury of voluntaristic self-assertion, Heidegger puts forward a phenomenology of openness and care which is heavily indebted to Kierkegaard; this development reaches its fruition in later writings such as the *Discourse on Thinking*, which is also an

worth trying to understand, for it would be good to have a sense of what it means for a person to live truthfully, rather than existing in a state of falsehood. Authenticity, as defined in a contemporary philosophical dictionary, has something to do with one's emotional orientation toward the world: it is said to be the "condition of significant, emotionally appropriate living."² If we accept this as a working definition, then we should recognize at once that any account of authenticity must rely upon some theory of emotion (or "passion").

Furthermore, the most promising explanations of emotion that have been offered in recent philosophical psychology defend some version of the thesis that emotions are intentional phenomena: that is, if I am afraid, then my fear is *about* something that is frightening me. Whether or not they always involve explicitly formulated judgments, emotions must in every case include a perception of some object and an evaluation of its significance. Emotions, as Martha Nussbaum argues, "are not just the fuel that powers the psychological mechanism of a reasoning creature, they are parts, highly complex and messy parts, of this creature's reasoning itself."³ In other words, I cannot be angry at you for taking the car if I know

uncharacteristically concrete dramatic work. See Michael E. Zimmerman, *Eclipse of the Self: The Development of Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity*, revised edition (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986) pp. xxiii–xxxii. See also John D. Caputo, "Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1993) pp. 201–24. Heidegger does not at any point represent the authentic self as "responsible for creating meaning *ex nihilo* by throwing values over a neutral field of objects," as Lawrence Vogel points out in *The Fragile "We"* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994) p. 49. It is Sartre who, until the very late work *Sartre by Himself*, believes most strongly in "the power of the individual will to impose meaning on an inherently meaningless universe," as Anthony Rudd notes in *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 169. For Sartre, authenticity is found not in passionate response but in volitional activity; the world is "magically transformed" by passion only when we lack the "power and will" to force it into conformity with our own purposes: see *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1993) pp. 58–65. On Sartre's view, authenticity is both *reflective* and *momentary*—not perceptive and continuous—because value, he thinks, is self-positing, and anything outside of one's own control (including other human beings) can only be perceived as an instrument to serve my purposes or else a threat to my unimpeded freedom. See Linda Bell's appreciative study, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989). On the infantile fear of vulnerability that condemns Sartre's moral agent to find the world difficult to live in only because he is not in total control of it, see Richard Wollheim, *On the Emotions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) pp. 86–87. It takes courage to allow objects and persons to make a claim on us; what is needed for a philosophy of authenticity is a moral psychology of appropriate emotional response and an ethics centered around the cultivation of virtuous and trustworthy dispositions. This would require an anti-Heideggerian attention to the narrative context of ordinary life, as well as a non-Sartrean appreciation of subjectivity as embedded in a network of relations with a world of significant objects and persons external to the self.

²For example, one Heidegger commentator writes: "Authenticity and inauthenticity in the existential sense depend on the mood [and] every mood has its implicit understanding," reflecting "what we are interested in or affected by." Bruce W. Ballard, *The Role of Mood in Heidegger's Ontology* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991) pp. 64–66. For Sartre, authenticity is linked with taking responsibility for one's "being-in-situation." See, e.g., the discussion by Ronald E. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995) pp. 93–96. The definition of "authenticity" that I cite is from Simon Blackburn's *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 30.

³Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p. 3.

very well that the car is parked right where I left it.⁴ My anger depends upon a certain view of the world, and this view could turn out to be either accurate or distorted. In other instances of passion, a similar cognitive structure can be found: a (more or less articulate) perception of the world in light of a person's sense of what is important. This theory, which first appears in ancient Greek ethics, is defended in one form or another by such contemporary Anglophone philosophers as Robert Solomon, Ronald de Sousa, Robert Gordon, Michael Stocker, and Nussbaum herself.⁵ As she points out, the philosophical explanation of such phenomena should attend to the kind of defective thinking that goes on within the context of human experience, and therefore the philosophy of emotion cannot limit itself to an artificially abstract realm, without characters and situations.

The analysis that follows will rely upon such an understanding of emotion, while also drawing upon the observation that *narrative* is the mode of writing that "can give us a vivid picture of the inner life of its characters," thus enabling us to identify the flaws of their belief-forming processes.⁶ Narrative texts illustrate not only the *reliability* of a person's judgments but also the internal *coherence* of a person's emotional dispositions and the *correspondence* between particular episodes of emotion and immediate states of affairs. Given the personal and perspectival nature of emotion, it is especially appropriate for a philosopher concerned with the integrity of our emotional orientation to the world—that is, with the problem of authenticity—to shed some light on how this problem might show up within a concrete narrative. One author who has this concern and, as "a kind of epistemologist,"⁷ attempts to dramatize patterns of emotional falsehood, is Kierkegaard. He recognizes, as some "existential" writers do not, that authentic emotions are connected with specific features of the external world and therefore cannot simply be mustered up by the isolated will. From a text such as *Either/Or*, the two-volume narrative that inaugurates Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship, we can gain a better understanding of the passions as a (potentially reliable) form of rational activity.

2. HISTORICAL ORIENTATION

The adequacy of Kierkegaard's theoretical understanding of emotion is beyond doubt. He resembles the ancient Stoics in being preoccupied with the passions, but he opposes them in holding open the possibility of authentic emotional perception.

⁴This example is adapted from Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life*, revised edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993) p. 118.

⁵A valuable survey of these arguments, with extensive references, is John Deigh's "Cognitivism in the Theory of Emotions," *Ethics* 104 (1994) 824–54. For a more recent overview, see Kristján Kristjánsson, "Some Remaining Problems in Cognitive Theories of Emotion," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 41 (2001) 393–410.

⁶Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 22. See also my "Emotion, Morality, and Narrative" in *One World: Essays on Nussbaum on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Leonard Ferry (Albany: SUNY Press, forthcoming).

⁷As he is characterized by Robert L. Perkins: see "Kierkegaard, a Kind of Epistemologist," *History of European Ideas* 12 (1990) 7–18.

On the topic of “authentic *pathos*,” he writes that “only great souls are vulnerable to passions”⁸—and his ideal of emotional truthfulness has been characterized by Robert C. Roberts as one of “proper pathos.”⁹ His research notes on Stoicism contain evidence of careful study in the original language. He notes that Zeno’s classification of the passions is a way to distinguish among what in Danish are called *Lidenskaberne*—a word that has strongly intentional connotations.¹⁰ He frequently speaks of passion in relation to belief, judgment, and truthfulness, thereby showing that emotion and cognition are deeply connected in his understanding.¹¹ For example, in *Either/Or*, the comparison of ancient and modern drama mentions a character with an “almost unveracious” passion,¹² directly applying a truth-functional adjective to an affective state. In another text, the Greek words for “moderate passion” are used to describe the skeptical equanimity of someone who has abdicated his deepest beliefs.¹³ Elsewhere, Kierkegaard makes it clear that a certain mood may be necessary for a certain understanding: no one lost in tranquil speculation, for instance, could understand the concept of guilt.¹⁴ His pseudonymous authors speak of the “conclusions of passion” and the “passion of the understanding,”¹⁵ and one of the passages in the first part of *Either/Or* even employs a coined word that means “suffering-through” to denote the mental process of undergoing and working through the meaning of an ongoing emotion (*E/O*, I 31).¹⁶

We know that Kierkegaard learned about Stoicism in Tennemann’s history of philosophy, which gives a reliable account of the classical view that passions are “always founded on some belief” that, according to the Stoics, “ought to be . . . eradicated.”¹⁷ Clearly, this knowledge was not lost on the Danish thinker: his own work demonstrates an awareness of the way in which an underlying mental attitude could be

⁸*Papers and Journals: A Selection*, trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin, 1996) p. 115.

⁹“Existence, Emotion, and Virtue: Classical Themes in Kierkegaard” in Hannay and Marino, p. 179.

¹⁰See *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967–78) III: 3126. References to this edition of six volumes plus index will hereafter be abbreviated to *J/P* plus volume and entry number.

¹¹On the relation between emotions and beliefs in Kierkegaard’s “phenomenology of moods,” see David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 90.

¹²*Either/Or*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) I: 163. References to this two-volume edition (*Kierkegaard’s Writings*, 3–4) will hereafter be abbreviated to *E/O* plus volume and page number. Other citations of the Hongs’ Princeton edition, *Kierkegaard’s Writings* (26 vols., 1978–2000), will be to book title and page number.

¹³*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (*Kierkegaard’s Writings*, 12), p. 399. The Greek words are *metriōs pathēin*.

¹⁴Journal entry from 1846. See *Søren Kierkegaard’s Papirer*, 2nd edition, edited by Niels Thulstrup and Niels Jørgen Cappelørn (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968–78) VII¹ A 192. References to this Danish edition will retain its distinctive numbering system.

¹⁵*Fear and Trembling* (*Kierkegaard’s Writings*, 6), p. 100; *The Sickness Unto Death* (*Kierkegaard’s Writings*, 19), p. 39.

¹⁶*Gennemliden* would be the modern Danish version of the word Kierkegaard introduces.

¹⁷W. G. Tennemann, *A Manual of the History of Philosophy*, trans. Arthur Johnson (Oxford: Talboys, 1832) pp. 147–50.

related to the occurrence of a particular episode of emotion.¹⁸ For Kierkegaard, as Roberts notes, “virtually any concern (passion, interest, enthusiasm, attachment, involvement) can give rise to any or all of the whole range of emotions.”¹⁹ In his works, the best measure of an object’s significance for a certain person is the severity of the grief that this person would feel if it were lost: “the more grief at the loss of the particular, the more its reality and value in one’s life.”²⁰ Just as this grief could be more or less appropriate to the actual state of the world—it would be irrational for me to mourn the loss of something that I have not lost, or something that never existed in the first place—other emotions are susceptible to being veridical or groundless in the same way. Kierkegaard scholars tend to say very little about his emphasis on the cognitive aspect of passion, but it is only because of this emphasis that he is rightly characterized as an advocate of “passionate thought” or of “passionate reason.”²¹ He condemns sentimental or inauthentic emotion for the sake of drawing a contrast with “true and genuine feeling” (*J/P*, III 3125), because he is concerned about the integrity of passion, which he describes as “the main thing . . . the real dynamometer” for human beings (*J/P*, I 888).²² Accordingly, he outlines a way in which a person might achieve authenticity by eliminating faulty emotion. If we pay attention to the intentionality of emotion as we read *Either/Or*, we can develop a structural analysis of the moral psychology of inauthenticity, thereby identifying some of the defects of character that are incompatible with authentic passion.

3. READING *EITHER/OR*

“The air is so warm, and yet the whole city is as if deserted. Then I call to mind my youth and my first love—when I was filled with longing; now I long only for my first longing” (*E/O*, I 42).

In one of his fragments, the young man known only as “A” shows us a portrait of his own soul, cast onto the outward landscape. As we see, it is a strange combination

¹⁸For an example of the former, see *For Self-Examination* (*Kierkegaard’s Writings*, 21), p. 45; of the latter, see *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 311. Roberts comments on the two aspects of “passion” in “Existence, Emotion, and Virtue,” p. 185.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 185–86. Cf. Nussbaum, on the Stoic view of emotion: “To cherish something, to ascribe to it a high value, is to give oneself a basis for the response of profound joy when it is present; of fear when it is threatened; of grief when it is lost; of anger when someone else damages it; of envy when someone else has it and you don’t; of pity when someone else loses such a thing through no fault of his or her own.” *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) p. 370.

²⁰Ronald L. Hall, *The Human Embrace: The Love of Philosophy and the Philosophy of Love: Kierkegaard, Cavell, Nussbaum* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2000) p. 71. The object of an emotional attachment need not be a person or a thing; it could be a social cause, a creative project, or whatever else one might care about: see Hubert Dreyfus and Jane Rubin, “Kierkegaard on the Nihilism of the Present Age: The Case of Commitment as Addiction,” *Synthese* 98 (1994) 16–17. See also Freud’s account of how “love” ought to be regarded as including “love for parents and children, friendship and love for humanity in general, and also devotion to concrete objects and to abstract ideas.” *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1959) p. 29.

²¹See, respectively, Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938) p. 99; and C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

²²See also, e.g., *Letters and Documents* (*Kierkegaard’s Writings*, 25), pp. 123, 135.

of intensity and emptiness. He shows some awareness of this evident paradox when he describes his own condition as one of tormented sterility. He longs for emotion, “to have the viscera of both anger and sympathy shaken,” yet he finds himself impassive—he feels like a chess piece when it cannot be moved (*E/O*, I 22–24). Devoted as he is to momentary passion, sometimes even to the point that he finds himself “painfully moved,” at other times he listlessly drifts in an unemotional void (*E/O*, I 20–21). These conflicting instants never appear to be resolved into a temporally consistent self-understanding. Instead, they are experienced as a series of discrete episodes, each of which is without any connection to past or future.²³ Kierkegaard’s moral psychology of inauthenticity begins with the moment of immediate emotional perception as exemplified by a pseudonymous author. We will get quickly to the heart of his critique if we can figure out how this literary character is able to fluctuate so rapidly from passionate agitation to lifeless apathy.

As we have seen, emotions are responsive to objects in the world about which a person is concerned. To be moved and then attempt to preserve the raw feel of one’s emotion in abstraction from its grounding conditions is to lose touch with the emotion’s meaning. When “A” talks of once having longed and now longing for that old longing, he makes this kind of shift. In the first case, his emotion was world-oriented, with an object outside of himself; later, the object of his emotion becomes *his own emotion*. It is one thing to admire another person, and quite another to admire oneself admiring. In the latter case, the emotion has been cut off from its outward foundations and has become inauthentic or sentimental. This is what Kierkegaard means when he writes: “Sentimentality is to true, genuine feeling as the sparrow to the swallow. The sparrow lets the swallow build its nest and get everything ready and then lays its young there.”²⁴ The sentimental or inauthentic person, in other words, wants to have the effect without the cause, to experience an *affect* without having to deal with its grounding conditions. So we find “A” rejoicing in the moment of emotion (say, of falling in love) by taking his emotion home like a precious treasure, which is no longer a response to value but something valued in itself (*E/O*, I 24). Once this shift has taken place, the sentimentalist can dispense with whatever was moving—so he kicks away the ladder he has used to climb up into his emotional state.

As his correspondent points out in the second volume of the narrative, “A” demonstrates that “sentimentality and callousness are one and the same” (*E/O*, II 318). His life is a dialectic between responsiveness and disengagement:

You let everything pass you by; nothing makes any impact. But then something suddenly comes along that grips you, an idea, a situation, a young girl’s smile, and now you are “involved” (*E/O*, II 196).

²³Cf. Zimmerman, p. 120; see also Berthold-Bond, p. 135. Sartre says that what unites the various aspects of bad faith is a kind of self-contradiction: see *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992) p. 98.

²⁴*Papers and Journals: A Selection*, trans. Hannay, p. 48. (See *J/P*, III, 3125.)

He is not involved, but only “involved,” because the passions arising out of his participation in concrete reality are kept separate from their original objects. And once they are deprived of the reason for their existence, they tend to lose their force and then vanish, leaving the aesthete with apathetic exhaustion in the wake of his passion. Here we might remember Oscar Wilde’s saying that the sentimentalist wants to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it.²⁵ This short-lived emotion followed by emptiness is what he must suffer for taking the easy way out, rather than attending to the intentional referent of his emotion. Take, for instance, an episode of grief: this supposedly involves beliefs about a valued person that one has lost. If one really feels this way, one will continue to live with the painful awareness that this uniquely valuable person has been irrevocably lost. But to do so, Kierkegaard says, is too much for most of us: what we prefer is a “momentary upsurge” of grief, followed by “spineless nonsense.” Letting it register and accepting its consequences would make life too strenuous (*J/P*, II 2120). The sentimentalist never allows his emotional state to sink into him. He has the beginnings of an authentic response, such as “this is sad,” but then he quickly forgets and proceeds to ignore the source of the sadness.

Here, in the momentary upsurge and the spineless nonsense—that is, the passion whose meaning is lost on the aesthete and its abstract aftermath in which he lives oblivious to this meaning—lie some of the serious defects of an inauthentic emotional existence. If we take emotions seriously as perceptions of significance, we should try to appreciate their significance by understanding what is being perceived: namely, the value (to us) of particular objects of concern. But “aesthetic pathos,” as another pseudonymous author says, has these structural flaws: it either distances itself from existence or else is present in it through an illusion.²⁶ In other words, the inauthentic person either assumes an inappropriately detached point of view or else participates in the moral world on false terms. Thoughtful emotional responses, for Kierkegaard, can be described as “a kind of immediate impression of the way things are,” much like sense perception.²⁷ In using the term “aesthetic” Kierkegaard means to return to the Greek sense of *aisthêsis*, rather than limiting himself to its modern association with the philosophy of art. What happens with the aesthete, then, is that his perceptions are sensationalized, as the objects that prompted them are forgotten:

What a strange, sad mood came over me on seeing a poor wretch shuffling through the streets in a somewhat worn pale green coat flecked with yellow. I felt sorry for him, but nevertheless what affected me most was that the color of this coat so vividly reminded me of my childhood’s first productions in the noble art of painting. This particular color was one of my favorite colors (*E/O*, I 23).

²⁵*De Profundis* (New York: Penguin, 1986) p. 196.

²⁶*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 432. For the Hongs’ “esthetic” I substitute “aesthetic” here and throughout.

²⁷Roberts, “Existence, Emotion, and Virtue,” p. 197; see also Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971) p. 3. Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima* 417b–418a.

What begins as an intentional perception with moral significance (i.e., it involves compassion) shifts to a mere color-perception, and from there to the aesthete's basking in an afterimage, as he forgets the coat and contemplates a detached, merely sensational, color-phenomenon. If his emotion is about anything, by the end of the passage, it is about himself, as he mixes in a nostalgic memory. For the most part, though, it has been emptied of meaning and turned from a perception into an objectless sensation.

Sometimes "A" notices certain qualities of the object but not others, as when he hears the sighs and cries of anguished unhappiness as beautiful music (*E/O*, I 19). These may sound beautiful, but they are also the expression of a meaning which is not beautiful: to be moved only by their beauty, one must be blind (in this case, deaf) to other properties of the object to which one is responding. This is how emotion frequently becomes inauthentic: one misrepresents the world in order to feel the way one wants to, noticing only those details that justify a pleasant response (or an unpleasant response, if this is what one is seeking). This kind of selective attention is a form of self-deception; it is at *least* an epistemic fault, and may take forms that are morally dangerous as well. If we regularly shield ourselves from perceiving whatever features of reality do not appeal to our taste, we will be limited to the inauthentic emotions that arise from seeing only what we want to see. This limitation distinguishes the implied author of each of the aesthetic texts that make up the first volume of *Either/Or*. Reality can have significance for the inauthentic person only as momentarily boring or superficially interesting, and he disregards any deeper meaning that it may contain.

Because of his impoverished conception of emotion, the aesthete is prevented from even thinking about whether the basis of a given passion is solid or shaky, clear or confused. Since he is not concerned about the accuracy of his emotions, he might as well be satisfied with a sentimental "longing gazing into an eternity" (*J/P*, III 3802), in which the inauthentic feeling is allowed to throw "a twilight glow over existence, like the blue mountains on the distant horizon," and "the unclarity of the soul's condition is to be satisfied with the greatest possible ambiguity."²⁸ This indefiniteness is typical for the aesthete, whose fixation on the raw force of emotion leaves him uninterested in getting clear about its object. But when we ignore the reason for the existence of our passions, we cannot tell if they involve some kind of falsity. If we do not take our emotional responses seriously in the first place, we cannot follow them up with a sustained awareness of whatever has affected us. We can only enjoy the momentary upsurge, then follow it with spineless nonsense, acting as if nothing significant has happened. So, after being momentarily affected, the aesthete suddenly cuts away the ties that bind him to life "in order to rejoice in his lightness" (*E/O*, II 192). In this way, his sentimentality feeds upon itself, adding moral evasion to mental distortion and entailing a wholly corrupt relation to the world. To merely focus on subjective pleasure, and to "kick over the traces" that connect one's passionate reaction to the object that prompted

²⁸*Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (Kierkegaard's Writings, 10), p. 16. Kierkegaard elsewhere condemns "the indefinable frauds of indefinite feelings." *J/P*, III 3301.

it, is to free oneself from the conditions that hold one's life together in time.²⁹ It is to introduce a gap between the object that is being perceived (that tree, my beloved) and the qualitative phenomenon (the color green, my feeling of being in love) which is being experienced.

The refusal to acknowledge the content of one's own emotions can easily deteriorate into a refusal of any honest involvement with external reality. Kierkegaard believes that to acknowledge a proposition fully one must embody a palpable sense of its truth: we do not truly understand any morally relevant idea unless we can express its truth in our lives. So when "A" states that he lacks the courage to acknowledge anything (*E/O*, I 23), and that he continually views his life from the standpoint of eternity (*E/O*, I 39), we can see his escapism from the contingent world as a result of his refusal or failure to acknowledge the responses that he has when he *does* "swoop down into actuality" from his remote emotional fortress:

My sorrow is my baronial castle, which lies like an eagle's nest high up on the mountain peak among the clouds. No one can take it by storm. From it I swoop down into actuality and snatch my prey, but I do not stay down there. I bring my booty home, and this booty is a picture I weave into the tapestries at my castle. Then I live as one already dead. Everything I have experienced I immerse in a baptism of oblivion unto an eternity of recollection. Everything temporal and fortuitous is forgotten and blotted out (*E/O*, I 42).

The sorrow of young "A" is not really sorrow, once he has lifted it out of its context: he dips into actuality only to take flight from it and adopt a detached attitude toward his own existence. His mood is not "intelligently perceptive" in Heidegger's sense, because it is not open to the being of concrete things.³⁰ Indeed, it seems that a higher-order awareness of his own mental state is all the aesthete needs in order to set off on a flight from moral reality, in which everything subject to time and chance is left behind. Only two days after comparing his mind to "a turbulent sea in the storms of passion" (*E/O*, I 324), the author of the "Seducer's Diary" has made this shift: "How beautiful it is to be in love; how interesting it is to know that one is in love. This, you see, is the difference" (*E/O*, I 334). With this step the aesthete withdraws from the challenge of being present *in* his emotion. He fails to develop the "true and lucid consciousness of the situation" which is a necessary condition of authenticity.³¹

²⁹See *The Concept of Irony (Kierkegaard's Writings, 2)*, pp. 255–56.

³⁰*Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperPerennial, 2001) pp. 24–25. Cf. Iris Murdoch's discussion of the moral importance of "attention," that is, "a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality." "The Idea of Perfection," in *Existentialists and Mystics* (New York: Penguin, 1999) p. 327. On "letting go of the self and uniting with the object of attention," see also Robert Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982) pp. 88–89.

³¹Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1965) p. 50. This phrase is unobjectionable in itself: Sartre's error is to suggest in what follows that authentic being-in-situation is primarily based upon an act of unconditioned self-choice. On the Christian opposition to *pride* which lacks any sense of reverence or awe, believing that godlike omnipotence can prevail over passivity and need, see Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, p. 527. Heidegger associates *Gelassenheit* toward particular things with a more general receptiveness toward the mystery of being in *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) p. 55.

It should be possible to be *aware* of one's emotional state without abstracting oneself from it, but for Kierkegaard's seducer it seems that the shift from being in love to knowing *that* one is in love is a step from inhabiting a state of emotion to observing it from a spectator's point of view. This, of course, is the only perspective from which it is possible to be in control of one's emotional world: it is as *participants*, not as onlookers, that we are able to perceive meaning in ordinary life. The purified consciousness sought by Sartre (and other philosophers intoxicated with the fantasy of carefree detachment) cannot be reconciled with an honest acknowledgment of how the self is defined by its world-oriented relations of care.³² In our defensive quest to attain a view from nowhere, we do violence to the uncertain realm of human existence. When we are disengaged from our surroundings, everything seems empty and absurd: we are free from emotions because nothing under the sun is meaningful to us.³³ Since the Stoic adopts this ethical perspective, the stoical self is described by Kierkegaard as "the most isolated self" of all (*J/P*, IV 3898).³⁴ This stoical withdrawal from contingent reality into the pure freedom of thought is incompatible with Kierkegaardian authenticity.³⁵ It involves a defensive attempt to isolate mind from world, forgetting that our subjective consciousness can have no intentional content except in relation to external reality. As fundamentally emotional beings, we are distinguished by our affective bonds with the world; when we reduce ourselves to the "cool" vantage point of abstract rationality, everything fades into insignificance and there is nothing to be affected *by*.

A theme that Kierkegaard never tires of emphasizing is how false it is to abstract from concrete existence in this way, as when "participants would shrewdly transform themselves into a crowd of spectators" and attain an objective, inauthentic state of being.³⁶ There is an important emotional difference between the actor on the stage and the actual moral agent (*J/P*, I 149). If our thoughts are not the building in which we live, then something is wrong (*J/P*, III 3308). When we observe

³²See, e.g., *The Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Noonday Press, 1957) pp. 98–106. Such manly pretensions of invulnerable "freedom" are duly rebuked by a number of contemporary feminists. See, e.g., Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984) p. 51; Robin May Schott, *Cognition and Eros* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1988) p. 114.

³³See Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1991) p. 6. See also Marion, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) p. 118.

³⁴Kierkegaard is discussing Marcus Aurelius XI.3. The notion that we human beings ought to play the role of spectators is also defended by Epictetus: *Discourses*, I.6.19–20.

³⁵There is some evidence of a "stoical consciousness" in Heidegger's emphasis on disillusionment, as Berthold-Bond argues (pp. 126–30), since it is difficult to see how the self could authentically come to terms with the world from such an estranged position. Murdoch discerns a stoical vein in Sartre's thought, also: see "Hegel in Modern Dress," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, p. 149. See also Roberts, "The Socratic Knowledge of God," in Robert L. Perkins, ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985) pp. 151–52.

³⁶*Two Ages (Kierkegaard's Writings, 14)*, p. 73. Heidegger stresses that *Dasein* is not "mere cognition" in the "spectator sense" in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) p. 276; see also *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996) pp. 256–58.

our own lives as the objects of aesthetic response, we forget that we ourselves are involved in the drama and that our beliefs about it ought to take shape in the indicative mood, not only the subjunctive. But the inauthentic person, who resists the virtues of consistency and commitment, will be incapable of future-oriented emotion for the same reason that he cannot follow up on the ways he has been moved in the past. Since he does not think of his identity as extended in time, he is incapable of making promises: “Sure,” he says, “I will say something, but I will not be bound by my words.”³⁷ As long as he regards everything with such a detached attitude, he will inevitably drift along as a stranger to the human community: he may live in physical proximity to others, but he cannot share their world. He does not possess an awareness of his moral situation, or of his own place in it. The aesthete does not *mean* to falsify his intentional perceptions—he simply fails to see that an emotion cannot survive after being uprooted from its grounds.

4. RESOLUTION AND CONCLUSION

The transition that the aesthete resists is from inspiration to resolution, from being affected to taking responsibility. Even weak, incipient passions reveal that we are already beginning to take an interest in significant features of existence, even if we have been only intermittently and tentatively engaged so far. In his passionate responses, the aesthete is onto something crucial. Kierkegaard only hopes that those who have been “moved by the aesthetic” will “decide to follow along” in the right way.³⁸ It is one thing to fall in love, and another thing to make a specific commitment to love another person. To identify with an emotional response, to integrate into one’s awareness the recognition of value that it embodies, is an essential part of achieving integrity as a coherent self. Subjectivity is not an isolated phenomenon; it develops in the midst of interdependent relations with objects and persons in the external world.³⁹ As the judge writes in one of his letters to “A”:

Your life disintegrates into nothing but interesting details . . . [but if] the energy that kindles you in such moments [of passionate inspiration] could take shape in you, distribute itself coherently over your life, well, then something great would certainly come of you. (*E/O*, II 11)

This, to borrow another of Kierkegaard’s images, would convert the “mighty blast of enthusiastic breeze that fills the sails as you set out” into “the steady wind that

³⁷For *Self-Examination*, p. 75.

³⁸*The Point of View (Kierkegaard’s Writings, 22)*, p. 7. See also Johannes Sløk, *Kierkegaard’s Universe*, trans. Kenneth Tindall (Copenhagen: Danish Cultural Institute, 1994) p. 53.

³⁹Cf. Kresten Nordentoft, *Kierkegaard’s Psychology*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978) pp. 241–42. See also Patricia J. Huntington, “Heidegger’s Reading of Kierkegaard Revisited,” in Martin Matustik and Merold Westphal, eds., *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) p. 48. On this topic more broadly, see also Pia Søltoft, “Love and Continuity: The Significance of Intersubjectivity in the Second Part of *Either/Or*” in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1997*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997) pp. 210–27.

fills the sails evenly so that you continuously move forward.”⁴⁰ One becomes authentic only by virtue of having a consistent moral character, a temporally-extended self. As MacIntyre says, “in the ethical life the commitments and responsibilities to the future springing from past episodes in which obligations were conceived . . . unite the present to past and to future in such a way as to make of human life a unity.”⁴¹ This narrative coherence shows itself in dispositions toward authentic responses to various situations: the price of having a life that makes sense is that one must suffer through the emotional highs and lows of all the stories in which one is a participant. But this is precisely what the inauthentic person resists. Preserving a fantasy of abstract freedom and moral control, he reduces the faculty of practical choice to a vanishing point of unlimited liberty.⁴² So he plays multiple roles without ever taking on any definite identity, dipping into the world in order to enjoy the experience of emotion, but never becoming immersed in it. His inauthentic flirtation with reality prevents him from experiencing passions deeper than immediate pleasure and distress. As a result, he cannot perform any moral role that requires sustained care: he can be a dilettante but not a devoted artist, a philanderer but not a faithful lover, a momentary acquaintance but not a steady friend.

An emotionally inauthentic life places severe limits on one’s ability to become a person. Just as the narrator of Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* cannot ever become an insect,⁴³ the aesthete cannot become something as simple as an honest sports fan. For example, a fan of the Chicago White Sox is someone who responds in certain ways to certain contingent events: calls made by umpires, results of baseball games, and other associated events (ranging from a major injury to a star player to a promising season by a minor-league prospect). A *true* fan cares consistently about these events—she does not shift from one allegiance to another, or from enthusiasm to disinterest—and her care is the basis for her liability to be moved one way or another as the relevant events unfold. Hence, it may be said of someone that she lives and dies with the White Sox: that is, her abiding care for this particular team disposes her to many states of emotion. One day she will be pleased by an extra-inning victory, but at another time she will be worried that cold weather conditions at Comiskey Park will have an adverse effect on the home team’s batting average. Being an authentic fan means faithfully suffering through all of this, for better or worse. Yet the aesthete, who resists

⁴⁰Unpublished fragment from 1847. *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, VIII² B 35:8.

⁴¹*After Virtue*, 2nd edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) pp. 241–42. Davenport notes that Kierkegaard “shows the existential indispensability of precisely the sort of personal commitments that MacIntyre succeeds in linking to the virtues.” “Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics” in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, ed. John Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Open Court, 2001) p. 291. See also Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) p. 47: “In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going.”

⁴²Kierkegaard credits Augustine with the discovery that the idea of *liberum arbitrium* is fantastic, since the will has “a history, a continuous history.” See *Papers and Journals: A Selection*, trans. Hannay, pp. 524–25.

⁴³Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Classics, 1994) p. 6.

commitment, “cares” about the team only when its success is a source of immediate pleasure. So he is momentarily gladdened when the Sox win the division, but he quickly abandons ship when they undergo a disappointing loss in the playoffs: that is, a loss disappointing to those who really cared in the first place. Likewise, the fair-weather friend who enjoys my company on some occasions, but shrugs and walks away when I am unhappy,⁴⁴ is not much of a friend at all: the emotions of true friendship depend upon a consistently maintained disposition of care for another person. Authentic passionate existence is not to be found in arbitrary choice or hedonistic self-interest; it relies upon sensitive perception of the external world.

Emotion is a response of the whole human being to the significance of whatever is being experienced. This attunement to specific features of the world allows a person to live in a moment rich with meaning instead of a weightless, attenuated instant. “Accurate, clear, decisive, impassioned understanding,” to use Kierkegaard’s excellent phrase (*J/P*, III 3705), could represent an ideal state of emotional insight in which one would have an “authentic interpretation of everything.”⁴⁵ And how could we, in our moral development, bring ourselves closer to such trustworthy judgment? Only by recognizing that accurate passions must be formed and reinforced over time, since they arise out of dispositions for which we are partly responsible—dispositions which are always conditioned by the quality of our emotional responses. The authentic person has established a coherent emotional orientation as an evaluator in a world of values, who is continually being reshaped in having impressions that are acknowledged or forgotten, accepted or rejected. He or she must sustain a critical vigilance over his or her emotions, refining the passionate capacities of the mind so that they are worthy of trust. Just as anyone who makes a dispassionate truth claim can be in a better or worse position to know that X is the case, someone who suffers an emotional response could be activating more or less reliable dispositions.⁴⁶ Authenticity depends upon the cognitive process of removing errors in judgment or erroneous forms of judgment. This is why it is necessary for the virtuous person to maintain an “honest distrust” of himself: the goal is not to rely upon any and every emotion, but to refine one’s fallible capacity to perceive things reliably.⁴⁷ Authentic existence, and the complex emotional responsiveness that it involves, thus becomes an exercise in attunement—and moral agency is therefore based upon a readiness to act in accordance with one’s appropriate emotional responses.

⁴⁴Cf. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964) p. 457.

⁴⁵This last phrase is from an 1842 notebook draft of *Either/Or*. *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, III B 185:2. (See *E/O*, I 497.)

⁴⁶Cheshire Calhoun, “Subjectivity and Emotion,” *Philosophical Forum* 20 (1989) 195–210; see also J. L. Austin, “Other Minds” in *Philosophical Papers*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) pp. 76–116.

⁴⁷*For Self-Examination*, p. 44. See also *J/P*, III 3127: “Let no one misinterpret all my talk about paths and passion to mean that I intend to sanction every uncircumcised immediacy, every unshaven passion.”

Moral perception is perspective-dependent in a way that mathematical reasoning is not. It involves a poetic form of cognition “that displays how the world is *seen*, known by *this* self, and moved by *these* emotions.”⁴⁸ Nihilistic skepticism about the meaning of one’s life can perhaps be overcome through a reverent acceptance of the passions that have shaped and will continue to shape the self; this is one way of authentically engaging with outward reality in spite of the temptation toward moral skepticism.⁴⁹ Kierkegaard suggests that by recognizing the extent to which our identity is defined by our object-specific passions, we may in each case succeed in bringing the self into an authentic relation with its emotional basis, which is also the source of value in each human life.⁵⁰ Indeed, it would be difficult to prevent our identity from being formed by what we love and care about; insofar as it is what enables us to perceive things as valuable, emotion is the ground of all practical rationality.⁵¹ Without its influence, we can find meaning only in a hollow mastery over objects, deceiving ourselves with the belief that we are the godlike creators of both self and world. Yet, because the passionate nature of the self is defined by what it loves and cares about in a world that it did not create and does not control, emotional authenticity depends upon a truthful recognition of the value of certain persons and things outside of the self.

Is it reasonable to speak in terms of truth and falsity with regard to emotion? The Stoics argue that it is, as does Socrates in the *Philebus*,⁵² and (going against much of modern philosophy) Kierkegaard shows, in his narrative portrayal of inauthentic consciousness, that the reliability of emotional cognition can indeed vary. To the philosopher who asks how a person could be responsible for having appropriate emotions, the obvious answer is: by developing evaluative dispositions based upon trustworthy judgments.⁵³ It is possible to pay attention to the

⁴⁸Edward Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve* (New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 18. Cf. Mary Warnock, *Existentialism*, revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) p. 55: “Authentic existence can begin only when we have realized and thoroughly understood what we are.”

⁴⁹See also Nishitani Keiji, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, trans. Graham Parkes (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990) pp. 50–51. Anthony Rudd observes that for Kierkegaard “authentic selfhood” is “developed only by entering into relationships”: see “Kierkegaard and the Sceptics,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 6 (1998) 85. Cf. Giorgio Agamben, “The Passion of Facticity: Heidegger and the Problem of Love,” trans. Paul Colilli, in *The Ancients and the Moderns*, ed. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) p. 226.

⁵⁰Cf. Lee Barrett, “Kierkegaard’s *Two Ages*” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984) p. 68. On the relation of the self to “the Source of all selves,” see also M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) p. 4.

⁵¹Other noteworthy discussions of the relation between emotion and identity include, e.g., Harry Frankfurt, “Some Mysteries of Love,” Lindley Lecture 2000, University of Kansas (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001) pp. 11–12; and Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) pp. 34–35.

⁵²Plato, *Philebus* 40d–e.

⁵³Such an incredulous question is asked by Ronald Green, in *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992) p. 42. Roberts himself draws upon a bizarre example in attempting to show that a person’s emotions can be at odds with his or her dispositional beliefs, in “What an Emotion Is: A Sketch,” *Philosophical Review* 97 (1988) 195–96. He claims that it is possible to be afraid for the safety of

intentional content of one's emotions or (on the other hand) to be ignorant of this. And the effort of attention needs to stretch across time: the passions must always be moderated with vigilant care, if the pitfall of inauthenticity is to be avoided.⁵⁴ When the authentic person is affected by some new perception, this must be weighed against his cumulative history of beliefs and evaluations. For the inauthentic one, there is nothing to weigh the new cognition against, so his emotions tend to be without internal coherence *or* correspondence to outward reality. By misunderstanding the nature of emotion, the inauthentic aesthete is prevented from attaining the "openness to horizons of significance" that Charles Taylor identifies as a necessary condition of authenticity.⁵⁵ If, on the other hand, there is a sense of "authenticity" worth preserving, it must begin with an integrity sustained over time through a person's faithfulness to past emotion and a sensitivity to the axiological claims made upon him or her at every moment.⁵⁶ This is not all that authenticity involves: Kierkegaard's difficult instructions for becoming an honest person could not be fully explained without a separate treatment of such concepts as primitivity, repetition, and the instant, and a discussion of what it means to become sober, or for the self to have its ground in the power that established it. But just from his analysis of emotional perception, we can already see that authenticity is not to be found in holding oneself apart from the ordinary world, or in an arbitrary willfulness which cannot accept the passivity of passion—and that is because it must involve the accurate perception of significant facts. The form of moral perception thereby vindicated is attentive to external particularity and constructive of individual subjectivity; it is a variety of practical reason well suited for a particularistic ethics and a perspectival epistemology.

one's family members while "sincerely admitting" that they are safe, and illustrates the point with an example of a racially unprejudiced person who is frightened upon seeing that his white sister is going out on a date with a man who is "as black as pitch"—but what does it mean to sincerely acknowledge the proposition that she is not being threatened, or to honestly embody non-racist attitudes? It seems to me that a person who is shaken with fear is not fully convinced that there is nothing to be afraid of, even if he pays lip-service to propositional attitudes that contradict this response. Roberts apparently wants to give full moral credit to the more enlightened beliefs that this person professes, even though they are betrayed by the racist convictions that he evidently feels. One advantage of an ethics of authenticity, if it is based in a cognitive phenomenology of emotion, is that it can evaluate such a conflicted person as less than fully admirable.

⁵⁴This project of emotional clarification is difficult to define or undertake in any case, but especially in an age that is clouded with dishonesty: see *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer VIII*² B 86. Yet the issue of how to become an honest individual is Kierkegaard's first and last concern, and his moral psychology of inauthenticity is an essential step toward the definition of what it would mean to be honest with oneself. Cf. Earle, "The Paradox and Death of God" in *Christianity and Existentialism*, ed. William Earle *et al.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963) p. 68.

⁵⁵Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 66.

⁵⁶As Roberts observes: "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and a Method of 'Virtue Ethics,'" in Matustik and Westphal, p. 151. It is misleading to conclude from this observation that Kierkegaard's themes are not those of post-Romantic existential philosophy, or that he could simply be read alongside Aquinas as a Scholastic virtue ethicist—as Roberts also suggests: see "Existence, Emotion, and Virtue," p. 177. Camus, like Kierkegaard, differs from Sartrean "existentialism" in his views about self and world; yet such differences can serve as the basis for a fruitful comparison, rather than excluding the non-Sartrean from any discussion of existential topics.

In his portrayal of the aesthete as a young man, Kierkegaard indicates what authenticity is not, leaving his reader with a better impression of what it might be. In the process, he also shows that philosophy can expand the domain of the cognitive beyond “pure reason” into the realm of emotion—without abandoning its commitment to the truth.⁵⁷

⁵⁷For helpful comments and discussion, I would like to thank Noel Adams, Jonathan Ellsworth, Alastair Hannay, Charles Larmore, Norm Lillegaard, Jean-Luc Marion, Edward Mooney, Martha Nussbaum, Sarah Pessin, James Reid, J. P. Rosensweig, and Anthony Rudd.