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PIETY, MACINTYRE, AND KIERKEGAARDIAN CHOICE: A REPLY TO PROFESSOR BALLARD

John Davenport

This paper concerns a debate between two previous articles in *Faith and Philosophy*. In 1995, Bruce Ballard criticized Marilyn Piety's argument that the Kierkegaardian "choice" between the 'aesthetic' and 'ethical' modes of existence is not an irrational or criterionless leap. Instead, Ballard defended MacIntyre's view that Kierkegaard's position succumbs to the tensions inherited from its opposing enlightenment sources. I argue in response that Ballard sets up a false dilemma for Kierkegaard and misunderstands Kierkegaardian pathos. To bolster Piety's position, I compare her analysis to my own argument (developed in an earlier paper) that the "choice" to determine oneself in light of ethical distinctions has to do with the personal appropriation, not the authority, of morality. I also compare this to arguments from several other scholars that the choice in *Either/Or* has to do with taking responsibility for and developing one's 'self,' not with providing a foundation for moral norms. Finally, in light of these analyses, I argue against Ballard's remaining socialist criticism that Kierkegaard's ethics is "bourgeois."

I. Introduction

In her 1993 paper, "Kierkegaard on Rationality," Marilyn G. Piety argues that in *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre misinterpreted Kierkegaard when he said that for Kierkegaard, "the transition from an aesthetic to an ethical view of existence" can only be made by an arbitrary or "criterionless choice."¹ Piety's view is hardly uncommon: for several years now, Kierkegaard scholars have almost unanimously rejected MacIntyre's irrationalist reading of Kierkegaard as a grave misinterpretation.² But apparently many in the wider philosophical community still remain unconvinced. In his recent response to Piety in this journal,³ Bruce W. Ballard argues that Kierkegaard's *Either-Or* exhibits conflicting tendencies towards overcoming the aesthetic stage either by a Hegelian "objective refutation" or by the alleged decisionism of a "passionate choice."⁴ In response, I will compare Piety's analysis to my own previously published argument against MacIntyre's contention, which Ballard repeats, that "Kierkegaard's ethical stage has no authority but the passion of the individual choosing it."⁵ Once the fallacy in this contention is understood, it will be easy to dispatch the remaining errors in Ballard's argument against Piety.



II. Ballard's Dilemma for Piety

Against MacIntyre, Piety maintains that in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard portrays despair brought about by persistent or deep misfortune as facilitating the transition from the "aesthetic" to the "ethical" stage of human life: since the ethical framework explains suffering tragically, i.e. as "essential" to temporal existence, the aesthete who despairs of living in immediacy discovers that the ethical framework may have first-personal significance for his own experience.⁶ But Ballard, following MacIntyre's *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article, objects that there is a "blank inconsistency" in Kierkegaard's desire both to give an "objective refutation" of the aesthetic sphere by showing that it "fails by its own criteria" and yet to leave the decision to "passionate choice,"⁷ which Ballard identifies with the affects of romanticism: "Hegelian dialectic and the romanticism of feeling do not combine for a coherent theory of choice."⁸

There are several problems with this alleged dilemma, both as a dismissal of Kierkegaard's endeavor and as a response to Piety's interpretation. First, Ballard interprets Kierkegaard's emphasis on the problem of suffering and exposure to the whims of fortune as a Hegelian dialectical move: "Kierkegaard is clearly trying to exhibit contradiction internal to the aesthetic point of view..."⁹ But, while Kierkegaard's progress from immediacy to the ethical and on to the religious does parallel *part* of Hegel's dialectic,¹⁰ the suffering towards which Piety points is not a simple contradiction in aesthetic life that would *compel* one into the ethical sphere. The necessity with which Hegel endows his transitions of spirit is missing in the passage between Kierkegaard's existential stages, since they allow for freedom. Moreover, as we will see, the despair through which the aesthete begins to take account of the ethical is not the completed choice to leave aesthetic existence, but only the practical condition of possibility for this choice. As Alastair Hannay says in his remarks on *Either/Or*, the point of setting up a pseudonymous "confrontation of the two views of life" is precisely to provoke "something like a direct or intuited realization of the preferability of the ethical from a direct comparison of the two views," without appeal to external authority.¹¹ But the choice is not criterionless, as Hannay says, because it is to be made by people starting *within the aesthetic*. Kierkegaard's aim is

to raise the levels of consciousness of such people sufficiently for them to see the point of actually calling their preferences aesthetic, and thereby enable them to see that there could be an alternative.¹²

And once the alternative is made explicit or self-conscious, a number of considerations will reveal the rightness of the ethical, though again without *forcing* its election.¹³ In particular, buttressing Piety's point, Hannay notes that the aesthete's attempt to live in "the succession of moments" generates a sense of dependence on fate outside his control that "leads easily to despair."¹⁴ This critique of the aesthetic is more similar to Socrates's argument in the *Republic* that the tyrant's soul cannot

achieve happiness than to an inexorable Hegelian *Aufhebung*.

Having misinterpreted this aspect of Kierkegaard's position as an attempted *demonstration* that the ethical must supersede the aesthetic with Hegelian necessity, Ballard completes his false dilemma by misreading the other horn—"passionate choice"—as mere sublime "feeling." In this, he ignores Piety's argument that for Kierkegaard, "passion" or pathos is neither mere emotion nor disinterested reflection, since it involves a rationality that is "not reducible...to reflection" in the speculative sense.¹⁵ Rather, there is a kind of "rational assessment of phenomena" which is *interested* because it involves "subjective engagement" or has the *self* as its object, but is nevertheless not capricious like a mere affective reaction.¹⁶ I would describe the same point by saying that Kierkegaard preserves a place for *volition* in its classical 'middle-soul' sense: like emotion and unlike abstract speculation, the practical deliberation Piety describes is first-personally motivating, but unlike impulses and brute preferences, it has intentional content, cognitive significance, and is reasons-responsive. The motivation generated in such practical deliberation is "subjective" in the first-personal but not the non-cognitive sense. In particular, Piety believes that such 'volitional passion,' as we might call it, is connected with our essential interest in "determining or choosing the proper interpretation of existence;" hence, in "impassioned or subjective judgment" the aesthete can be motivated to enter the ethical framework by the improbability of persistent suffering on the aesthetic account of life.¹⁷

Against this central point, the only objection Ballard offers is that "the proper degree of passion cannot be specified."¹⁸ Here again, however, the idea that the will is either guided by a purely "theoretical grasp of my ultimate end" or else it is not "rationally guided" at all and anything goes,¹⁹ presents the same false dilemma in another guise. As Gordon Marino put it in another valuable analysis of MacIntyre's critique, saying that "we always have a choice" is not to say that "we always have a coin to toss." In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre himself acknowledges that there is "something between chance and demonstration."²⁰ And as Anthony Rudd has explained in a recent study, Kierkegaard gives good reasons in his analysis of skepticism for concluding that the will "to commit oneself to what is dubitable" is already involved in all "substantive knowledge,"²¹ and this includes knowledge of ethical precepts. Contrary to MacIntyre's portrait of Kierkegaard as an enlightenment thinker who accepts the need to demonstrate the authority of moral contrasts and principles without presupposition, Kierkegaard never held that morality can be justified to the amoralist from a neutral, "disengaged" stance: rather, the *interestedness* of the will affects how we interpret the conditions of human fulfillment, which in turn prescribe in what ways we should be interested. This circle is not vicious, but it cannot be escaped through some Archimedean skeptic-defeating insight into the ethical. As Rudd says against MacIntyre, however, the Judge is "constantly arguing" for the ethical, not simply "giving portraits of the ethical life," and his arguments are powerful just "because they are concerned with what 'A' — or anyone else — is interested in attaining: happiness,

well-being, *eudaimonia*.”²² Similarly, Marino argues that “Kierkegaard’s concept of choice presupposes a universal but not universally recognized need to be whole.”²³ Or as Piety puts it, “Kierkegaard maintains that we have an essential interest in determining or choosing the proper interpretation of existence”²⁴ which makes self-unity possible. In short, the Judge’s arguments appeal to the situated, existing will that conditions the aesthete’s interpretation of fulfillment, though without *determining* it to choose the ethical—and this is just what Piety found in her analysis of the *Postscript* as well.

III. A Comparison of My Defense of Kierkegaard to Piety’s

In my 1995 paper on “The Meaning of Kierkegaard’s Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical,” independently of Piety,²⁵ I gave different arguments for the same conclusion that MacIntyre is wrong in construing Kierkegaard as an irrationalist and in analyzing the “primordial choice” to be an agent who chooses in ethical consciousness as free only in an *arbitrary sense*. Drawing on Harry Frankfurt’s argument that the most distinctive feature of persons is their capacity to form what he calls higher-order volitions by which persons “identify” with some of their possible motives for acting while alienating others (whereas agents who act on desires without such higher-order volitions are “wanton”), I argued that the “primordial choice” which Judge William describes in *Either/Or* Vol. II can be interpreted as the choice between remaining “wanton” or taking responsibility for one’s “self” through higher-order volitions.²⁶ Therefore the primordial choice to become a chooser-in-the-ethical-sense (chooser_e) does not generate the *authority* of ethical principles for the individual, as MacIntyre assumes, but rather gives the distinction between good and evil personal relevance and application within the individual’s life—for only “inner character” or dispositions of the higher-order will can have moral virtue, rectitude, or their opposites.²⁷ Thus when a person makes choices in the higher-order will, identifying with some possible action-guiding intentions rather than others in light of their varying values, she is choosing “in the ethical sense” for Kierkegaard, and her volitional identifications will have moral worth or unworth. But the objective authority of her conscience—the cognitive aspect of her values and standards of moral worth—does not *derive* from her original choice to form her self through higher-order volitions. Thus I compared the position of a conscious or awakened aesthete, who finally faces this choice, to that of someone who knows the traffic laws but has not yet driven: her decision to get behind the wheel *involves her personally* in this practice for the first time, and will lead to her acquiring a “driving character” (e.g. reckless, overcautious, defensive, etc.) but it hardly creates the authority she recognizes in the traffic code or the virtues of a good driver.²⁸ Similarly, the Judge’s point in *Either/Or II* is that the aesthete should engage in the practice of *selfhood*—or higher-order volition—through which she will acknowledge her self and acquire status on the scale of moral worth.

If this reading is right, it constitutes a decisive refutation of the claim

that “Kierkegaard’s ethical stage has no authority but the passion of the individual choosing it.”²⁹ This analysis fills out Marino’s point that, in *Either/Or*, “Kierkegaard thought he was writing about choice in fundamental connection with the formation of the self and the purification of the will,” rather than “aspiring to produce a basis for morals” in the wake of Kant’s failure. In the face of this fact, MacIntyre’s account appears to be either a willful misconstrual or a wholly unjustified suggestion that Kierkegaard had unconscious, ulterior motives.³⁰

Similarly, the close relation between Kierkegaardian passion and volitional identification shows what is wrong in Ballard’s view that it is incoherent to make “the choice for the ethical a purely subjective and passionate one while the concept of ethics is abstract and universal.”³¹ For the primordial choice to be a chooser, or “to live seriously as opposed to indifferently,”³² as Marino puts it, is made by identifying with some set of values or “ground projects” (whether good or evil) that give first-personal significance to norms and precepts: their universal form therefore does not imply that they need be “impersonal” or external to the agent’s motivating concerns.³³ The force of these arguments against incautious charges of irrationalism will be all the greater if my analysis and Piety’s are mutually reinforcing, as I believe they are. Although we adopt apparently quite different strategies in defending Kierkegaard from such charges, there is an underlying convergence between our interpretations, which I will outline in five items.

First, higher-order volitions are *rational passions* in Piety’s sense: “the ‘earnestness’ and ‘pathos’ characteristic of good or evil choice do not signify mere intensity of emotion...but rather that the choice unequivocally associates the *inward self* with the content chosen.”³⁴ Similarly, although he initially analyzed a “second-order volition” simply as a desire that is about another desire — a desire to be guided or moved in one’s bodily actions by one first-order desire (A) rather than another (B)³⁵ — Frankfurt later modified this analysis in recognition that to *identify* with desire A rather than B must involve more than merely having *another desire* to act on A.³⁶ The higher-order volition is not merely a further desire or brute preference, but rather an attitude that essentially includes a non-arbitrary evaluation, which itself involves “deciding what to think.”³⁷ Identification is a process of *personally engaging* the whole self through a kind of reasoning, namely an “interested” or non-detached practical reasoning: in other words, higher-order volition is “will” in the classical middle-soul sense, constituting a type of motivation between engaged appetite and disengaged intellect. Unlike the wanton, the person who engages in volitional identification is “*participating* in conflicts within himself between second-order volitions and first-order desires...”³⁸ This notion clarifies what Piety is trying to indicate with the Polanyian idea that “passion” signifies a direct “personal participation” of the agent, as opposed to “disinterested” reflection on our options.³⁹ Since this capacity for higher-order volition is arguably identical to the “spirit” in which alone we develop our “self” for Kierkegaard,⁴⁰ it also becomes clearer why “passion is the very essence of human existence,” as Piety says.⁴¹ This is true precisely because “passion” for Kierkegaard is first-personal

identification in something like Frankfurt's sense; it is the volitional capacity which makes us persons.

Second, after distinguishing the "primordial choice" to engage in volitional identification from the recognition of ethical distinctions as authoritative, I argued that when the aesthete in *Either/Or II* faces the choice between the aesthetic and the ethical explicitly, she is conscious of a primordial responsibility to choose the ethical.⁴² Her choice is thus not reasonless or unmotivated, and as a result she can no longer remain in the neutral immediacy of the aesthetic: if she tries to return to it, she instead enters *sinful defiance* (denying the ethical responsibility of which she is nevertheless aware).⁴³ Marino concurs: "if you are really facing the choice, you have already chosen to choose;" you can refuse the ethical in defiance, but cannot return to the aesthetic, since the aesthetic is the stage in which "earnest choice" that recognizes one's selfhood (or capacity for volitional identification) is lacking.⁴⁴ Therefore the aesthete can remain in her stage of existence only by a kind of tacit refusal to face the choice implied by her selfhood, a state of "bad faith."⁴⁵ This substantially agrees with Piety's point that for Kierkegaard,

even the least reflective individual can only avoid recognizing the tenuous nature of happiness on the aesthetic view of existence by *willfully refusing* to reflect upon the significance of this view.⁴⁶

Third, I also argue that the process by which the primordial choice between the aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence becomes salient for the agent—or is "forced" in James's sense—is a complex one in which both the individual's experience and willingness to face the insufficiency of the aesthetic play a role.⁴⁷ Piety's argument that suffering or misfortune may force the issue on Kierkegaard's view explains part of this process by which an individual is elicited out of immediacy and brought to face the question of how to determine her *third* or *highest-order* will, i.e. the will either to form second-order volitions and thus to acquire an inner character (whether good or evil), or to resist forming such volitions and (vainly) try to live in the immediate ebb and flow of first-order desires and preferences.⁴⁸

Fourth, Piety's thesis that the passion of suffering gives significance to "extra-framework criteria or reasons for choosing" between the aesthetic and ethical frameworks helps fill in a gap left by my earlier analysis. While I asserted that the person facing the primordial choice does not choose arbitrarily because he already discovers a primordial responsibility to choose ethical choice (or to form a higher-order volitional character), I did not try to explain the phenomenal source of its objective authority. Piety's view that Kierkegaard's individual has an inherent desire for an interpretive scheme that makes sense of her subjective experience and explains the basis on which her happiness depends,⁴⁹ which she compares to Taylor's "need for meaning,"⁵⁰ suggests an intriguing way of answering this question. This is not to deny Marino's concession that Kierkegaard does not fully face the questions raised by "moral diversity" or differences of ideals, nor does he emphasize rea-

son's role in deriving or grounding specific moral precepts.⁵¹ But it goes too far to claim that duty has no rational basis, or that "for Kierkegaard, the force of our oughts in no way rests upon the answers to our whys."⁵² For as I have suggested, Kierkegaard's focus on the "internal" as opposed to the "external" should be read as asserting the decisive importance of the higher-order will in determining our moral worth: this does not imply that our outward acts and their consequences are irrelevant, nor that there is no role for casuistry.⁵³

Fifth and finally, like Piety, I argued in my article that the freedom involved in passionate choice for Kierkegaard is a kind of "liberty" — since the outcome is not determined by its antecedents and alternate possible outcomes are accessible to the agent— but *not an indifferent liberty* in which the individual neutrally or randomly picks between options. Instead, Kierkegaard holds that the range of available choices and the apparent value of different options to the individual is always conditioned by the character she already *is*, i.e., by both her outward habits of bodily action and her inward dispositions of the higher-order will. Since actualized choices shape these features of character which condition the availability and salience of options in future choices, no choice in this existential model is ever just "arbitrarily reversible."⁵⁴ And because the person naturally begins with an *aesthetic* character, including a tacit highest-order will (in bad faith) not to make choices informed by ethical distinctions, even the primordial choice of the highest-order will is not indifferent.⁵⁵ Piety concurs, noting that arbitrary choice is impossible on Kierkegaard's account, because

Kierkegaard believes that we inherit an aesthetic interpretation of existence simply by being human and that we will never adopt any other perspective without a specific reason for doing so; and such a reason cannot arise, on his view, unless we take an interested stance toward the phenomena of our subjective experience.⁵⁶

Hence "For Kierkegaard, there is no sitting on the fence between selves," as Marino says.⁵⁷

In sum, my account and Piety's converge on five basic points about ethical authority, free choice, and the structure of personhood —in *Either/Or* and the *Postscript*, respectively. Together our analyses provide a deeper defense of a view summarized by Timothy Jackson, which may represent an emerging consensus among Kierkegaard scholars today:

Ethical and religious questions call for passionate choice, but the choice is not arbitrary. Kierkegaard is a realist with regard to ethico-religious truth and a fallibilist with regard to ethico-religious justification; his introduction of volition and emotion into the equation...does not spell the loss of objective norms for right behavior.⁵⁸

Thus it is particularly imperative that we not make MacIntyre's error of ascribing the value-relativism and absolute liberty of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* to Kierkegaard: as Jackson says, there is "the widest pos-

sible intellectual distance between Kierkegaard's conception of subjectivity and the arbitrary individualism of Nietzsche and Sartre."⁵⁹

The natural next step in the approach Piety and I have taken is to argue against the still widely held view that Kierkegaard is a theological voluntarist in the sense of holding that "God is not bound by even the highest moral rule" and therefore that the knight of faith "may be called upon to violate generally valid moral rules."⁶⁰ Against this familiar reading, I have argued that the sense in which Abraham "suspends the ethical" in *Fear and Trembling* has nothing to do with adding to humanly communicable ethical standards a new "requirement of obedience to God's particular commands."⁶¹ Rather, on my reading, the famous "teleological suspension" refers to the expectation ("absurd" by every human standard of possibility) of an *eschatologically possible* reprieve in the realm of temporal finitude, a miraculous turn which fulfills the ethical and even restores the individual to ethical validity.⁶² The personal relation to eschatological divinity which such faith involves certainly transcends communicable ethical relations, but it *incorporates* and goes beyond them by *realizing* the eternal ethical ideal in the actuality of time, rather than violating the ethical.⁶³ If this reading can be extended to other pseudonymous works concerned with religious categories, it will show that the "leap" from the ethical to religious spheres of existence is no more arbitrary or misologist than the choice by which the aesthete first relates herself to her selfhood and enters the ethical sphere.⁶⁴ So much for Ballard's MacIntyrian equation of Kierkegaard's divine Absolute with "the Blakean concept of God as Nobodaddy."⁶⁵ This analysis also shows that Kierkegaardian faith is hardly a "revised form of Pascal's wager" as Ballard says⁶⁶: for the designation "absurd" means precisely that eschatological possibility is *incalculable*, not that faith is prudentially rational.

IV. Ballard's Remaining Socialist Objections

Against this background, the rest of Ballard's objections, which are made directly against Kierkegaard rather than towards Piety, can be dealt with in quick succession. First, Ballard argues, amazingly, that "Kierkegaard's paradigm of the ethical stage is the life of a self-satisfied bourgeois."⁶⁷ For those who would have thought that this better described the *aesthetic* stage, Ballard's evidence for this claim is that "Kierkegaard's ethical is virtually apolitical," individualistic, and lacking in "any clear notion or concern for justice..."⁶⁸ Living on his own inheritance, he thinks money is irrelevant, and to the poor he offers only an unforgiving puritanical work ethic. Moreover, by ignoring the social structures in which work is embedded, "Kierkegaard ends up making a virtue of alienated labor."⁶⁹

In response to this quasi-Marxist critique, we must openly acknowledge that Kierkegaard did not devote himself to casuistry, i.e., deriving rational precepts of natural justice (though he acknowledges that such principles exist), nor did he develop an account of justified political authority on their basis. This was not his task: Kierkegaard was not Aquinas, much less Rawls. But this difference in focus hardly suffices to

make his ethical outlook "bourgeois." His emphasis on many different forms of charity in *Works of Love* alone is sufficient to disarm this charge. As the Hongs write in their introduction to this book:

...there is...also a social otherness in the emphasis on love of neighbour. This is not an ethic of socio-political structures but an ethic of social-structures-at-hand, whatever the larger socio-political structures might be. Those who say that Kierkegaard had no consciousness of anything but a purely private individualistic ethic cannot digest this work, nor, when properly understood, his other ethical works, but least of all this.⁷⁰

Kierkegaard does not, *pace* Ballard, conceive the ethical as a purely individual determination in isolation from social relations: as Anthony Rudd has emphasized, "For Kierkegaard, morality is a product of commitment to roles and relationships."⁷¹ Rudd describes this feature of "engagement" which the aesthete avoids as "long-term commitment;"⁷² I have analyzed it similarly in terms of volitional identification. But although such identification is a free decision of the individual, Rudd is right that it is precisely identification *with a social self*,⁷³ i.e., with dispositions, motives, and ends that constitute the "character" who we become in the social world—the character expressed in our actions and intelligible to others as the object of interpersonal interpretation. We identify with being a character that locates us in social space as an agent with commitments or cares based on shared understandings of what is important or worthy of being cared about. This point is implicitly conceded in Ballard's own objection that "Kierkegaard would have us see every job as a calling," although Ballard misreads this as validating alienated labor.⁷⁴ As Rudd notes, the Kierkegaardian agent living in the ethical mode "chooses to accept social roles" rather than merely occupying them: for example, through ethical participation in eternity, Judge William incorporates his social roles as citizen, judge, father, and husband into the continuity of his life.⁷⁵ The point is not that workers should passively consent to exploitation, but that our work should express what we care about, that we should be able to engage ourselves in our jobs, or embed them in our "self" through identification. And interestingly, this is similar to what Marx meant in his critique of wage labor and his ideal of *non-alienated* labor.⁷⁶ Since there are limitations on the kinds of work with which an ethical agent could identify, it is more plausible to read Kierkegaard's doctrine as diametrically opposed to the alienating labor processes of capitalism that divorce work from human identity and demand a purely instrumental conception of careers.

Finally, Ballard does not offer convincing evidence that Kierkegaard's "paradoxical religious stage" is anti-congregational and ignores the problem of expressing Christian faith "in wider social and political culture."⁷⁷ The attack on "Christendom" is not a rejection of genuine Christian community, but a critique, as David Gouwens says, of a "Bourgeois Christianity" in which everyone is regarded as "Christian" by default, a culture that "succeeds in making spiritlessness and worldli-

ness that mark of spirituality." Instead, Kierkegaard develops implications of an "inwardness" that leads to "an appreciation of how faith is manifest in works and hence also in the public sphere."⁷⁸ Thus Ballard's summary of Kierkegaard's ethico-religious life as "hard work regardless of pay, a vaguely church-going religion and the domestic idyll"⁷⁹ is both inaccurate and unfair.

In closing, let me acknowledge that the general picture which Ballard offers of Kierkegaard's ethical ideal —namely, solipsistic pietism reached by an arbitrary leap— is a picture that has been widely disseminated and often repeated. But Kierkegaard scholars have been refuting it for several decades now, and thus many of the points I make in response to Ballard are not new. It is unfortunate that this false picture of Kierkegaard's position continues to exert a strong influence, since its time as a defensible interpretation is clearly past, and it can now safely be consigned to the annals of famous misunderstandings.⁸⁰

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NOTES

1. Marilyn Gaye Piety, "Kierkegaard on Rationality," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993): 365-379, p. 367 and p. 366.

2. At the recent International Kierkegaard Conference at St. Olaf College (June 7-11, 1997), several speakers, such as Ricardo Gouvea, Gregory Beabout, and Steven Emmanuel (as well as Piety) made special points of noting that their interpretations undercut misreadings "like MacIntyre's." Their comments reflect the norm of Kierkegaard scholarship today. For a more sympathetic discussion of MacIntyre's critique, but which still rejects his interpretation of Kierkegaard's "choice to live in ethical terms," see Gordon Marino, "The Place of Reason in Kierkegaard's Ethics," *Kierkegaardiana* 18 (1996): 49-64, p. 49. Marino's paper appeared just after mine (see note 25 below) but they were in press at the same time.

3. Bruce W. Ballard, "MacIntyre and the Limits of Kierkegaardian Rationality," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995): 126-132.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

6. Piety, p. 367.

7. Ballard, p. 127.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

10. Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard* (New York: Routledge, 1982, 1991), p. 55: "Like Hegel, Kierkegaard starts out with a notion of 'immediacy,' a shape of spirit whose gradually revealed inadequacy as a basis for fulfillment paves the way to an alternative, the ethical shape, whose inadequacies in turn open the way to a further, religious shape. But instead of moving on from there to a philosophical mode of understanding in which, as Hegel says, the 'shape of the self' is added to truth as *content*...the shape that Kierkegaard's spirit assumes is one of pure isolation." In other words, the point of modeling the hierarchy of stages in earlier Hegelian terms is precisely to emphasize the *contrast* between Kierkegaard's highest stage —faith in the Absolute as eschaton— and Hegel's highest stage in Absolute

Knowing, in which "the active, social experience of oneness of all reality can be founded upon a shared and common knowledge of what it is to live a life of self-fulfillment" (Hannay, pp. 54-55).

11. *Ibid*, p. 59.

12. *Ibid*, p. 59.

13. Hannay lists different aspects of Judge William's argument: "His case proceeds at many levels: positive assurances that the aesthetical is preserved in ethical life, and appeals to A's better nature, accusations of deception and hiddenness on A's part, interpretation of the advanced aesthete's melancholy as an implicit acknowledgment of some higher ideal, and of the aesthete's intellectual recognition of the 'nothingness' of the aesthetic view of life as an admission of the inadequacy of that view from the start, and so on..." (p. 60-61).

14. *Ibid*, p. 61.

15. *Piety*, p. 368.

16. *Ibid*, p. 369. *Piety* has given a more extensive account of this type of rationality under her analysis of "subjective knowledge" in her dissertation on Kierkegaard's epistemology.

17. *Ibid*, p. 370, p. 371.

18. Ballard, p. 126-7.

19. Ballard, p. 369.

20. See Marino, "The Place of Reason in Kierkegaard's Ethics," p. 54.

21. Anthony Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 39.

22. Rudd, p. 78. Thus Rudd's conclusion that the argument of *Either/Or* is "clearly more reminiscent of Plato's and Aristotle's ethical writings than it is of Hume's or Kant's, and it is interestingly close to the Hegelian idea of social morality" [*sittlichkeit*] (Rudd, p. 80). I have expressed reasons for doubting this strong an anti-Kantian conclusion: see Davenport, §IV, esp. p. 87. But Rudd's focus on commitment in the social realm is convincing for the Judge's ethics, although the ethics of *Works of Love* offers a Christian account of virtue that transcends social convention. Compare Marino's summary of the Judge's argument that happiness depends on love, which depends on the ability to form one's life into a coherent unity (Marino, p. 55).

23. Marino, p. 56.

24. *Piety*, p. 370.

25. John Davenport, "The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical: A Response to MacIntyre," *Southwest Philosophy Review* 11 (1995): 73-108. I was not aware of *Piety's* article in early 1994 when composing this essay for publication.

26. *Ibid*, §III, pp. 78-85.

27. On this topic, see the discussion of inwardness and disposition late in the *Concept of Anxiety*, tr. Reidar Thomte and Albert Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980): pp. 146-150. This section makes clear that earnestness is something like a free disposition of the *higher-order* will: earnestness is "a higher as well as a deeper expression for what disposition is" (p. 148). While disposition strictly speaking "is a determinant of immediacy," and the repetition it involves is thus a "habit" (in the first-order will), earnestness is a different kind of disposition, because its repetition involves "originality preserved in the responsibility of freedom" and as a result, "earnestness can never become a habit" (p. 149). Earnestness in this sense is like *care* in Frankfurt's moral psychology, since cares are higher-order volitions sustained over time that commit the person authentically to

projects, people, and ends he regards as important. On my view, this idea of free dispositions in the higher-order will is the kernel of Kierkegaard's conception of virtue.

28. See Davenport, p. 85. This analogy, with its separation of the *authority* of principles and the personal *commitment* which involves one existentially with these principles in their authority, is also compatible with Rudd's more Hegelian account of Kierkegaard's "ethical" as "the willingness to make long-term commitments, to accept social roles, and, by doing so, to accept the *standards of evaluation that go with them*" (Rudd, p. 72, my emphasis).

29. Ballard, p. 128.

30. Marino, p. 57.

31. Ballard, p. 128.

32. Marino, p. 55.

33. See Davenport, §III-IV, pp. 78-89. As I explain in this article, this idea that norms are "incorporated" or subjectively appropriated is also central to Kant's understanding of the ethical (p. 80), and it shows how "first-person universal motivation" is possible (p. 88), contrary to the presumption on which Ballard is operating.

34. Davenport, p. 83.

35. See Harry Frankfurt, "The Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971); reprinted in Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 11-25.

36. See Harry Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," in *Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Ferdinand David Schoeman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); reprinted in *The Importance of What We Care About*: 159-176, p. 166.

37. *Ibid*, p. 176.

38. *Ibid*, p. 166.

39. Piety, p. 370.

40. I am thinking of "spirit" as it is analyzed in the *Concept of Anxiety* in particular.

41. Piety, p. 371.

42. Davenport, p. 90.

43. *Ibid*, p. 91.

44. Marino, p. 53.

45. Davenport, §V, p. 92.

46. Piety, p. 374.

47. Davenport, pp. 91-92.

48. *Ibid*, p. 92-3.

49. See Piety, p. 370: "Kierkegaard maintains that we have an essential interest in determining or choosing the proper interpretation of existence. Our eternal blessedness, or eternal damnation, is according to Kierkegaard, ultimately dependent on this choice." And p. 374: "Any individual who is sufficiently reflective to appreciate the tenuous nature of happiness on the aesthetic interpretation would find his existence, no matter how 'fortunate,' characterized by an anxiety or fear of potential adversity which would itself constitute a kind of suffering." The Platonic/Aristotelian aspect of Kierkegaard's interpretation of ethical authority is made apparent here.

50. Piety, p. 375.

51. Marino, p. 58.

52. *Ibid*, p. 59.

53. In support of his reading, Marino cites a text from Kierkegaard's

journals where he tries to answer Locke's well-worn argument that since some "savages" have very different views about right practices than we do, morality is culturally relative. Kierkegaard responds that "savages" who kill their parents, for example, may still do so out of love for them. His point, however, is not that it doesn't matter what you do "as long as your intentions are good" (Marino, p. 60) —or that one practice of caring for the elderly is not objectively better than another— but that there is an underlying precept of beneficence that is culturally universal, even though it is general and requires prudential judgment to be applied to particular cases. We might compare this, revealingly, to C. S. Lewis's argument in the *Abolition of Man* (Collier Books/Macmillan, 1947): pp. 97-100.

54. See Davenport, §VII, p. 97-100.

55. Davenport, p. 92.

56. Piety, footnote 23, p. 378.

57. Marino, p. 52.

58. Timothy P. Jackson, "Kierkegaard's Metatheology," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987): 71-85; p. 77.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 72. Jackson attributes this point to scholars such as Malantschuk and Prenter.

60. Frederick Olafson, *Principles and Persons: An Ethical Interpretation of Existentialism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), p. 28.

61. *Ibid.*

62. This argument was first given in my paper, "The Absolute as 'Eschaton' in *Fear and Trembling*," presented at the Eastern Division meeting of the *American Philosophical Association* (New York, December 29, 1995). Its central theme is outlined in my article, "The Essence of Eschatology: A Modal Interpretation," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 19 (1996): 206-239, §III, pp. 213-216.

63. In this respect, I think it is significant that each of the versions of the Akedah narrative offered at the beginning of *Fear and Trembling* stresses Abraham's abiding love for Isaac. The norm which Abraham appears to violate but finally fulfills, through God's mercy, is specifically couched as a *love commandment*: that a father must love his son. This suggests that the "ethical" at stake in *Fear and Trembling* is not merely Hegelian Sittlichkeit or Kantian formal universalizability, but instead the agape ethics that Kierkegaard later defends in his own name in *Works of Love*. Though agape is substantive rather than formal, this book stresses not only the *universality* of agape-norms, but also the traditional antivoluntarist idea that the love of God, rather than potentially conflicting with the love of other human beings, is *indispensable* for interhuman agape.

64. Piety makes the point that the transition to Christianity is not arbitrary, since it has an awareness of sin as its existential criterion. But since this concerns the transition to Christian religiousness specifically rather than to religiousness in general (Religion A of the *Postscript*), I will not discuss this view here. On the relation of faith and reason in Kierkegaard, see an interesting recent treatment by Karen Carr, "The Offense of Reason and the Passion of Faith: Kierkegaard and Anti-Rationalism," *Faith and Philosophy* 13 (1996): 236-251. Partly on the strength of Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Revelation*, she also rejects MacIntyre's irrationalist reading (see Carr, pp. 237-239). Though I think Carr underestimates the degree to which both reason and the ethical remain essential in the religious sphere, space does not permit a fuller discussion of the relation between faith and reason in Kierkegaard.

65. Ballard, p. 131.

66. *Ibid*, p. 130.
67. *Ibid*, p. 128.
68. *Ibid*, p. 128-9.
69. *Ibid*, p. 129.
70. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, tr. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), p. 17.
71. Rudd, p. 71.
72. *Ibid*, p. 69.
73. See Rudd, p. 77, where he discusses *Either/Or II*, p. 266-7: "...The self which is the aim is not merely a personal self, but a social, a civic self..."
74. Ballard, p. 129.
75. Rudd, p. 73.
76. See Alan Gilbert, *Democratic Individuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), ch. 7: "The Aristotelian lineage of Marx's eudaimonism:" "work only as a means of life, not as its varied expression" is central to the alienation that "communist individuality" is supposed to overcome (p. 265, p. 269).
77. Ballard, p. 130.
78. David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 214.
79. Ballard, p. 130.
80. A version of this paper was presented at the meeting of the Søren Kierkegaard Society during the Eastern conference of the APA, Philadelphia, PA, December 1997. I wish to express my thanks to George Connell and William Wainwright, who encouraged this project.