

John Davenport

# 10 The Esthetic Validity of Marriage: Romantic Marriage as a Model for Ethical Will: In Defense of Judge Wilhelm

(EO2, 523 – 703; SKS 3, 13 – 151; KW IV, 5 – 154)

## 10.1 Introduction: Higher-Order Will and the Judge's Status within Kierkegaard's Work

In this essay, I will consider Judge Wilhelm's defense of marriage in *Either/Or* as a basis for understanding the "ethical stage" or sphere of existence. Two decades ago, I argued in an essay on Judge Wilhelm's second letter to "A" the Aesthete that Kierkegaard's famous idea of a basic "choice" to become a serious agent whose choices are informed by ethical commitments can be *partly* understood in terms of Harry Frankfurt's contrast between a "wanton" without higher-order volitions and a "person" who forms and sustains cares through his or her higher-order will: a choice to move from wantonness to personhood is like Wilhelm's basic or primordial choice in certain respects.<sup>1</sup> This reference to phenomena of higher-order volition was never meant to be a complete explanation of ethical agency in Wilhelm's sense and its difference from "aestheticism" as a basic practical orientation in living. Among other limitations to this analogy, Frankfurt's initial conception of higher-order will itself was flawed in several ways (not all of which were fixed in his later conceptions of volitional caring and love). Thus I have sought to develop this interpretation in subsequent works by arguing

(1) that the "primordial choice," by which one leaves the aesthetic orientation and enters the ethical sphere (for it cannot go the other way) is modeled on the Adam's anxious first choice as described in *The Concept of Anxiety* (Davenport 2000, 131–151, esp. 145–46), which is a kind of *felix culpa*;

---

<sup>1</sup> See Davenport 1995, 73–108. I was not the first to make this suggestion: although I did not know it at the time, Edward Mooney had already proposed a similar approach (Mooney 1991, 99). Anthony Rudd had also rightly compared the judge's conception of ethical commitment to Bernard Williams' notion of personal "ground projects" that give us a lasting identity over time (see Rudd 1993, 85–87).

(2) that in light of Anti-Climacus's account of gaining or losing a conscience, this choice, need not be (and usually is not) a single conscious act or "sudden leap between life-spheres but rather a continual process" in which the cognitive and epistemic sides of agency develop together (Davenport 2001a, 307–8);

(3) that, as Anthony Rudd first argued, robust forms of *narrative unity* in the structure of one's practical identity involving social relationships, interpersonal devotions, and practices in MacIntyre's sense, are also crucial in explaining the superiority of ethical to aesthetic agency;<sup>2</sup>

(4) and that the Judge conceives the kind of "willing" that gives us a character for which we can be "deeply" responsible (i.e. autonomous character), which *A* self-deceptively avoids, as "projective motivation" that sets, reinforces, or amends an agent's final ends in response to practical considerations that extend beyond her prior desires or existing motives (Davenport 2001b, 166–67).<sup>3</sup>

This distinctive conception of willing, and higher-order will in particular, is implicit throughout the account of weakness of will and demonic agency in *Anxiety*; in descriptions of "spirit" and its role in selfhood at several points in *Sickness Unto Death* (Davenport 2013), and in descriptions of "earnestness" throughout Kierkegaard's authorship (including several edifying discourses and late signed works) (Davenport 2014). For example, this idea of will as a capacity that can respond to perception of goods by generating new motivation towards them is central to Kierkegaard's signed critique of shallow aestheticism and inauthenticity within public life, as seen especially in the lack of commitment to nobler aspirations among the "shrewd" bourgeois of his age.<sup>4</sup> "Will" in this distinctive sense of self-motivating effort, which lies between *willkär* as libertarian freedom and *willê* as practical reasoning, was never clarified by Frankfurt, though arguably it is implicit in his later accounts of volitional caring and love.<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard's many portraits of ethical agency (leading towards the religious in infinite resignation) also make projective willing dependent on objective values or goods in a way that corrects the problems arising from Frankfurt's contrary subjectivist position.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> I noted this point in Davenport 2001, but have only recently developed it in dialogue with Rudd's work and John Lippitt's questions in Davenport 2012.

<sup>3</sup> This was the idea behind the claim that the "absolute existential choice," establishes a "volition which is distinct from an internal desire or tendency to an end that is sufficient for 'acting' in Aristotle's and Hegel's sense" — see Davenport 1995, 83.

<sup>4</sup> See my comments on *Two Ages* in Davenport 2015.

<sup>5</sup> As I argued in: Davenport 2007, chs 13–14.

<sup>6</sup> I offer an extended summary of these corrections in: Davenport 2012, ch. 3.

These clarifications emphasize crucial differences between the conception of morally responsible human agency that we find in Kierkegaard's writings starting with *Either/Or II* and Frankfurt's own account of personal autonomy: in many respects, Kierkegaard offers a more subtle and nuanced picture of existential autonomy and authenticity, which is able to explain more of the relevant phenomena. Points (1)–(4) also suggest that most key aspects of Judge Wilhelm's account accurately reflect Kierkegaard's own considered views, anticipating ideas that are developed in signed works and in later pseudonymous works by more "authoritative" pseudonyms. This is important because many commentators in recent years have argued that the Judge is an unreliable source — because he is a self-satisfied bourgeois; or that he is too confident in the power of human will, confusing ethical striving with religious faith; or even that he takes Hegel's *Sittlichkeit* as the highest mode of life, which authentic religious faith overcomes. It has become increasingly fashionable in Kierkegaard scholarship to bash the Judge as representing a dubious perspective in the cast of Kierkegaard's author-characters, who is little better than "A."<sup>7</sup>

These demotions of the Judge are massively exaggerated, missing the subtle connections between themes in the Judge's letters and Kierkegaard's later works, and liable to miss the importance that Kierkegaard puts on ethical striving as something that must *continue* within religious faith.<sup>8</sup> The Judge's view is designed to be limited in various ways, especially in failing to grasp the full diffi-

<sup>7</sup> A more subtle case is ch. 4 of Amy Laura Hall's *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* (Hall 2002). While I think Hall is correct that Wilhelm's relation to his wife is patriarchal in some respects, it seems extreme to claim that he is merely using her as a basis for his own self-development (p. 113). Wilhelm does not portray his wife as his possession or mere adornment; and as I will argue, he is quite emphatic that married love is committed to endure when the beauty that initially triggered first love is altered — an agapic feature. Hall instead reads the critique of preference as selfishness in *Works of Love* in a way that would condemn *any* pro-attitude towards one's spouse that one does not feel towards all other persons as grasping or objectifying — an extreme conclusion that would require religiously sanctioned love to be entirely asexual, unfriendly, and downright cold.

<sup>8</sup> Such Judge-trashing interpretations thus often go together with a tendency to misinterpret *Fear and Trembling*, the *Fragments*, and *Postscript* as teaching that all human reason is worthless and all human volitional effort useless because of original sin — that is, that we are effectively helpless except by the inscrutable grace that enables us to obey divine commands deriving their authority from God's power. My essays on these pseudonymous works have tried to correct such misinterpretations of the religious stage; but for similar conclusions derived from careful study of Kierkegaard's later religious works, see Gouwens 1996, esp. 133–39 on faith, and 188–92 on love in *Works of Love*: following Sylvia Walsh, he concludes that for Kierkegaard, "Agape is not a love that eliminates and condemns the erotic, but in dethroning eros embraces and transforms it" (191).

culties of infinite resignation and faith — Climacus criticizes him on the grounds that I can leave aesthetic fantasy-life by the choice to despair of it (a productive type of despair), “but if I do this I cannot come back by myself [...] in this moment of decision [...] the individual needs divine assistance” (CUP 257–58). Yet the Judge’s texts still express much of Kierkegaard’s own views in his signed writings. Crucially, the Judge describes an “ethical agency” that responds not merely to human custom, social mores, or even the deliverances of natural law or Kantian practical reason,<sup>9</sup> but that is also based on love — interpersonal love between friends and between married partners as the paradigm for other types of caring or personal devotions informed by ethical ideals. The pervasive references to love throughout *Either/Or II* (and the Judge’s later speech on marriage in *Stages on Life’s Way*) should be evident to any careful reader: as Ronald Green says in an insightful account of the letter on marriage, “[f]irst love [...] is arguably the central theme of *Either/Or*,” from the “Diapsalmata” to the “Seducer’s Diary” and the Judge’s works.<sup>10</sup> Judge Wilhelm anticipates Johannes de Silentio’s focus on Abraham’s duty to love his son in *Fear and Trembling*, and the later ethics of commanded agapic love in *Works of Love*. As Michael Plekon argues, the Judge’s deeper insights are closer to those of the Jutland priest in the “Ultimatum” than to the platitudes of “bourgeois moralism” (Plekon 1995, 130). His view of ethical choice anticipates more of Kierkegaard’s “second ethics” than is often recognized:

This choosing [of oneself] must always be concrete, social, interpersonal, that is, in relation to one’s spouse, children, parents, colleagues. This is not a duty as a burden, but a loving action as a joy, a perspective later to be expounded in *Works of Love* (EOII, 170, 176-77).<sup>11</sup>

Though none of these ethical sources is simply rejected either: as I argued in my initial article (building on George Stack’s work), while the Judge’s task is not to offer any *theory* of the ground of moral obligation, one finds both Kantian stringencies and quasi-Aristotelian virtues in *Either/Or II*. While Rudd argued that the Judge’s *telos* is largely Aristotelian in content, I argued in “Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics” (Davenport 2001a) that it is existential rather than eudaimonist, or best defined in terms of a fully meaningful life.

Green 1995, 142. Green’s argument supports my sense that the findings in the first letter about romantic love are *generalized* in the second letter, making the continuation of first love in marriage a key to understanding the Judge’s more abstract later claims about choosing oneself into the ethical.

11 Plekon 1995, 132–33. Compare Edward Mooney’s analysis in his essay, “Kierkegaard on Self-Choice and Self-Reception” in the same volume: 5–32, 16–20; Mooney finds in the Judge’s writings hints of the later notion of religious vocation or identity before God that is set out in more explicitly revealed categories in *Sickness*. Note that in *Stages*, the Judge emphasizes that the beloved (and first love) can only be received as a gift from “the god” rather than as chosen (SLW 121).

Following Plekon and Green, I will contend that central themes in Judge’s first letter, “The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage”, confirm claims (1) – (4) above that ethical “choice” in Kierkegaard’s sense depends on higher-order volitions that respond to intrinsic values, and finally to “eternal” goods that obligate or necessitate our allegiance, much as in Kierkegaard’s signed discourse on “Purity of Heart” (in UDVS). The Judge’s account of romantic love’s potential helps explain how the transition from aesthetic to ethical life can be made. And although it may appear more optimistic about love of “particular” others than some parts of *Works of Love* do, in fact Wilhelm’s account anticipates Kierkegaard’s own later aim to explain how neighbor-love can be *expressed within* the “special” loves between family members, friends, and spouses when these are transformed by “conscience” (WL 141, 146).<sup>12</sup> Along the way, I will offer some further corrections and clarifications of the interpretation of *Either/Or II* that I offered 22 years ago.

## 10.2 Maieutic Appeal, Stage-Transitions, & Retractions on ‘Internalism’ & ‘Incorporation’

Judge Wilhelm’s second letter on the “Balance Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical” has received quite a bit of scholarly attention in recent decades because its famous notion of existential choice is philosophically interesting and potentially fruitful. By contrast, his first letter has received less attention, perhaps because its defense of marriage seems to some like a dated theme, especially if Wilhelm means “marriage” as it was conceived in 19<sup>th</sup> century European Christendom, or in Hegel’s portrait of an ideal family in the *Philosophy of Right* which gives little role to eros in marriage. But this is a mistake: for the Judge’s main goal in the first letter is to defend the thesis that marriage should be built on erotic or romantic love (compare SLW 105), through a commitment based on eternal ethical ideals that allows romantic love to be sustained through willed “repetition”. This commitment to another human person is the paradigm showing how ethically-guided choice enables full narratival development in one’s practical identity. This is a form of *ethical romanticism*, in contrast to the naïve, jaded, and sentimentalist forms of aesthetic romanticism portrayed in *Either/Or I*, and to the shrewd, materialistic, and calculating approach to life that Kierkegaard always condemned as the nadir of human spiritlessness.

12 Consider M. Jamie Ferreira’s efforts to explain this possibility of agapic special loves, in contrast to Amy Hall’s account (see note 7 above), in: Ferreira 2001, 91–94.

Contrary to the customs of his age, Wilhelm critiques unromantic marriage even more vigorously than the aesthetes in *Either/Or I* had. He condemns marriage understood as a civil arrangement, a mere contract that can be ended at will by divorce (EOII 23), and marriages of “convenience” – e.g. those arranged to promote “making a living” and “social status” (25) – as treachery against our true telos. So this supposed pillar of Victorian society, pictured by his critics in a stiff waistcoat tut-tutting over his wife, vehemently rejects the core norm of early modern bourgeois culture which held that marriage is for family and estate! He mocks the hypocrisy of polite parlor society by quoting the seamstress who says of “fine gentleman’s love: They love us but do not marry us; they do not love the fine ladies, but they marry them” (28). Much like Jane Austen, Wilhelm rejects this hollow custom and the psychic divisions it causes in favor of the romantic ideal – very much a minority view in Golden Age Denmark – that marriage should be primarily for *romantic love*, giving the latter the “absolute constancy” that it lacks in itself (as pure erotic “first love”) through ethical choice and effort (28). His main thesis is that:

[...] the first love, by being caught up into a higher, concentric immediacy, would [...] be secure against this skepticism so that the married love would not need to plough under the first love’s beautiful hopes, but the marital love would itself be the first love with the addition of qualifications that would not detract from it but would ennoble it (29-30).

The geometrical metaphor signifies that the aesthetic finds its proper place *within* the ethical, like two concentric circles: the retention of romantic love in marriage through “the energy of the will” that enables constancy (26) is Wilhelm’s paradigm for the way that aesthetic values must be preserved and transfigured in the higher frame of ethical goods. This is part of the cumulative relation among Kierkegaard’s existential categories.

There are many other phenomena by which Kierkegaard could have the Judge examine the retention of aesthetic goods within ethically informed projects or relationships, e.g. whatever is interesting or fascinating in scientific discovery, or the beauty of nature appreciated by a farmer devoted to the land, or the child’s smile as a wonder to caring parents. Yet the Judge takes romantic marriage as his paradigm illustration of the cumulative relation because it concerns *love* in several senses. This theme sheds light more directly on the nature and existential function of ethical norms and ideals, i.e. how they can give our lives structure and provide a deeper basis for identities that involve complex appreciations of aesthetic goods as part of larger ethical purposes. This focus might also help the Judge in his personal goal of getting young *A* to accept that the fundamental issue of choice into the ethical should concern him personally – the

theme of the letter’s whole “prologue” (5–17). His efforts to shake *A* out of his aesthetic spell extend to invoking the prospect of death.<sup>13</sup> But Wilhelm’s best chance to reach *A* probably starts with *A*’s own appreciation of aesthetic values in erotic moods and emotions – especially as revealed in moments charged with erotic interest, e.g. chance encounters, or accidental meetings of glances. Young *A* has a poetic eye for types of physical and psychic beauty and interest-value. Thus Wilhelm can argue to *A* that such values can be preserved and given full due only within an ethical troth: “All the beauty implicit in the erotic of paganism has its validity in Christianity insofar as it can be combined with marriage. This rejuvenation of our first love” is not nostalgia but rather “an action,” i.e. willed repetition (10).

What this shows, as Green explains, is that the Judge’s “sustained defense of marital love as the proper fulfillment of first love’s promise” is undertaken to demonstrate the *incompleteness* of aesthetic life-views and thus the existential need for ethical categories. This framing project, which continues into his second letter, involves two components within the “Aesthetic Validity” letter: (a) Wilhelm argues that the duty involved in marital love does not *preclude* “erotic and romantic love” (the Compatibility thesis); and (b) “he insists that first love is not only compatible with the ‘ought’ of duty, but that it invites and requires it” (the Completion thesis) (Green 1995, 146–47). This second, stronger thesis will explain how *A* can be given good reasons, recognizable by him *qua* aesthete, for moving into the ethical orientation.

This brings me to the fraught issue of *reasons-internalism*: does Kierkegaard hold that reasons that are practical for us, or that we can recognize as reasons to act in certain ways, necessarily draw their significance from desires or intentions that we already have (“internal” motives)?<sup>14</sup> Some recent commentators have argued that this is the best way to understand Kierkegaard’s idea of reasons that

<sup>13</sup> The Judge tells *A* that his effort to avoid action in favor of “imaginary construction” could lead to an experience of death, “when you are no longer shown any further possibilities in life”, in which “the earnest and faithful recollection of your conscience” reveals a list “not of actual crimes but of wasted possibilities, shadow pictures it will be impossible for you to drive away” (16). This idea clearly anticipates Kierkegaard’s own argument in his signed discourse “At the Graveside”: see my discussion in: Davenport 2012, ch. 5.

<sup>14</sup> So understood, reasons-internalism has a Humean provenance, as we see in Bernard Williams’s famous essay on “Internal and External Reasons”, reprinted in: Williams 1988. Contrast *judgment internalism*, which Connie Rosati defines as the thesis that “a sincere moral judgment” that we ought to  $\varphi$  entails “either justifying reasons or motives for  $\varphi$ -ing” – see Rosati 2006. Thus the motivational variant of judgment internalism does *not* require that motivation arising from sincere moral judgment be rooted in basic desires that are in turn logically or causally independent of our practical judgments.

can matter to us personally, or reasons that we can take to heart (e.g. as “subjective truth” in the *Postscript*). The Judge’s first letter emphasizes A’s potential: A only needs the patience to distribute “coherently over [his] life” the energy that he concentrates into aesthetic moments (11). Wilhelm thus seems to look for ‘hooks’, or values that his young friend A already recognizes or cares about, which could help make the importance of ethical commitment more urgent for A. As if reflecting on this strategy, immediately before invoking the thought of death, Wilhelm tells A that

there is an earnestness for which I know you even have an unusually deep respect, and anyone who has sufficient power to call it forth in you or sufficient faith to let it manifest itself in you will, I know, see in you quite a different person (15).

Like Scrooge’s nephew in Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, Wilhelm believes that A is near to recognizing the inadequacy of his fragmentary existence, or to seeing that his restless spirit can only find adequate expression in the continuity of an ethical life: this recognition only needs a little midwifery to be born in him. This is exactly the kind of “faith” in others that Kierkegaard extols in *Works of Love* as a duty of charity, because believing in the other person’s potential for goodness and love may be the very solidarity needed to bring the other to better choices (WL, 255).

Yet in my view, these ideas should not be understood in terms of reasons-internalism. Kierkegaard is no Humean about practical reasons: rather, he holds that considerations of value can be personally appropriated through setting new final ends and striving to reach them. Such a volitional response does not require that practical reasons or values *already* motivate us (and even when they do, our volitional response may alter the ways they motivate us). This picture of will as *motivation-generating* (rather than merely responding to one’s existing desires) is prevalent throughout Kierkegaard’s work: it explains why the leap of first choice in *Anxiety* is not arbitrary even though it is not determined by the agent’s prior motive-set and beliefs.<sup>15</sup> The Judge’s midwifery, then, lies not in appealing to ethical reasons somehow already “internal” to A’s extant motives, but instead in making *more salient* to A certain practical considerations of which A is already (more or less dimly) aware. To recognize the

<sup>15</sup> See Davenport 2001b, 166–68: as I explain here, it is Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s reasons-internalism which make it appear that the aesthete’s choice to enter ethical life must either be arbitrary or already motivated by ethical sentiments (in which case he was not really an aesthete). Because the *Concept of Anxiety* clearly means to reject this false dilemma, Kierkegaard cannot accept reasons-internalism.

relevance of a value as a live option for us, or begin to feel the justificatory force of a reason, or even to take an active interest in goods we have not previously pursued, are all possible without perceiving any instrumental connection between these goods and others that we already happen to desire or pursue. A’s capacity for earnestness is the potential, native in any personal agency capable of autonomy or responsibility for character, to be impressed by *the kalon*, i.e. various forms of “nobility” or values higher than commodity-goods and pleasures. This is why Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms constantly speak of “knighthood”. To notice such a noble good, or even be impressed by it, is (at least at the start) something short of desiring it, let alone deciding to pursue it: appreciating the significance of potential goals is neither as passive as merely given desires nor as active as forming an intention or acting on one. This intermediate, *middle-voiced* process in which we are influenced if we allow it, is the key to understanding the transition from a lower to a higher existence-sphere in Kierkegaard’s conception.

This is what I meant in 1995 when I wrote that Kierkegaard follows Kant’s idea that we have to “incorporate” a consideration into our “maxim” or plan of action for it to become a motive operative in action (Davenport 1995, 83). But this idea was inadequately formulated, leading to three confusions. First, Ian Duckles rightly argues that Kant’s principle is primarily a claim about moral agency, i.e. that individuals are always responsible because “they only act on principles that they have chosen to identify with” (Duckles 2005, 50, note 25). This partly follows my Frankfurt-inspired suggestion that “identification” with the motives on which we act is the main freedom-condition of moral responsibility for action.<sup>16</sup> But identification through higher-order volitions, now redefined to include (explicit or implicit) value-judgment or valuation, is only essential to fully *autonomous* agency – this is the view I mean to attribute to Judge Wilhelm and Kierkegaard. In later work, I have flagged this distinction, noting that a “wanton” in Frankfurt’s sense, like various unreflective aesthetes in Kierkegaard’s menagerie, can be responsible in ordinary (Strawsonian) senses for their actions: what they lack is *deep responsibility* for shaping their character through willed efforts – and this was the kind of responsibility I had in mind in my initial essay (see e.g. Davenport 1995, 85), though I did not make it sufficiently clear.

Second, Kant’s Incorporation Principle does not demand “identification” in either Frankfurt’s or my enriched sense: it merely says that combinations of beliefs with prior desires or inclinations do not directly cause intentions to arise in

<sup>16</sup> Duckles quotes this statement (41) but finds a different error in it: he thinks it would imply that no one is ever responsible (50, note 25) – though I don’t see why.

us. We have to choose to act on desires, emotions, or pro-attitudes in order to make them *purposive* (embodied in our intentions): this is what I more recently called the Kantian Principle of Action (KPA).<sup>17</sup> Such a choice to accept some inclination or attraction to value is usually tacit, rather than the specific focus of our reflective attention. We could call this a minimal sort of “identification” with a prepurposive motive that happens in “incorporating” it into one’s purpose or intention; in this weak sense, we “endorse” a desire as a reason for our action just by intending to act on it. *Minimal identification* then clearly differs from the *volitional identification* that is essential to autonomous agency, however the latter is explained: Frankfurt’s wanton “identifies” in the minimal sense with his addictive cravings in deciding to shoot up some heroin, though he is not acting autonomously.<sup>18</sup> This kind of endorsement is far short of striving through higher-order will to cultivate, build up, or sustain a certain pattern of first-order motives and emotions because they respond appropriately to certain values worth caring about.

Kierkegaard does not conflate morally imputable action in general with autonomous action for which we are deeply responsible: the Judge portrays aesthetes who understand basic normative demands or duties as responsible in the everyday Strawsonian sense (of being apt candidates for moral reactions from others who thereby hold them to account). For example, Wilhelm scolds *A* for forgetting “what you owe to those closest to you” and accuses him of a “rebellious insolence” that scorns “everything established by divine and human law” (14). He clearly thinks that *A* can understand duty and responsibility in the familiar sense of sanctions and reproach, even though *A* fails to form any lasting character to which deeper moral predicates of *good and evil* could apply, or to understand himself in terms of such a deeper identity. That is Wilhelm’s main point: choice<sub>p</sub> is the first effort to form higher-order volitions in response to the (at-first dim, weakly salient) responsibility to shape one’s practical identity by molding its given attributes into a worthwhile narrative structure through striving. Or if you prefer, choice<sub>p</sub> is the *virtual* choice that is made within

17 See Davenport 2007, 77 and 390. More fully, Kant’s Incorporation Principle is KPA (as an analysis of purposive motives) conjoined with an indeterministic conception of how we agent-cause imputable intentions: within the practical standpoint, we must see our choices as originating causes, not fully determined by prior desires and beliefs. Kierkegaard accepts a similar libertarian freedom-condition for responsibility but does not relegate it to the noumenal level.

18 Weak-willed addicts also minimally identify with their addictive desires (while also accepting contrary reasons on which they could act); unwilling addicts do not minimally identify with their cravings if they are literally unable to resist, i.e. if their desires and beliefs directly cause their intention, contrary to their higher-order will (in violation of the Incorporation Principle).

our more specific commitments – choices that shape our character as we begin to make more deliberate resolutions about other persons, political causes, and goods in the world beyond ourselves. It is the inward-reflexive aspect of outward-interpersonal caring.

Note that a reasons-internalist can accept KPA as compatible with the idea that all our purposive motives (on which we act or intend to act) derive from or depend on our extant prepurposive motives (as per Hume). But this internalist idea is not compatible with human agents forming *new purposes* in response to reasons that extend beyond the causal reach of their prior desires and purposes – which is also the most natural way to explain how someone can transition from aesthetic to ethical agency under the *guidance of reasons*. And in *Either/Or II*, we see the Judge continually encouraging *A* to open his eyes to reasons for accepting that the goods of love can only be fully realized through commitments that are grounded on moral duties. Such reasons are presently *external to A’s motive-set*; yet they are *accessible to A*.

Consider the meta-internalist alternative, according to which a motive such as a general desire for happiness, or for a meaningful life, or for an integrated self or authentic identity is just innate in us.<sup>19</sup> Now suppose that *A* already recognizes some meaning-value in “first love” that would be worth preserving, and Wilhelm can persuade *A* to believe that this value can be fully unfolded only in marital love. But such an argument could only move *A* to try out ethical commitment *as a means* to preserving his erotic love in order to gain a more meaningful life; it could not move him to care about ethical bases of commitment *for their own sake*. Thus the Judge rejects the motive of marrying in order to build character (EOII, 64–66) – just as he rejects marrying mainly in order to have children (68–76), or marrying “in order to have a home” or make a place of one’s own (76–80). He sees all these benefits of marriage as properly *by-products* of intending the beloved’s happiness and lasting relationship with her as ultimate goals: “it is always an insult to the girl to marry her for any other reason than that one

19 In their doctoral theses, Ryan Kemp adopts the reasons-internalist approach, while Walter Wietzke adopts the meta-internalist option of a motive that is constitutive of agency. I do not deny the latter’s appeal, for several passages suggest basic constitutive motives. For example, the Judge tells *A* that “Your life will amount to nothing but tentative efforts at living” (EOII, 7), as if thereby appealing to an innate desire for a more significant and integrated life through full use of one’s highest capacities (something like “realizing one’s potential”). And in commenting on *Either/Or*, Climacus says that “the ethicist in the moment of despair had chosen himself out of the terror of having himself, his life, his actuality in esthetic dreams, in depression, in hiddenness” (CUP 258); this suggests a constitutive desire for a meaningful life. Yet the specter of meaninglessness could also prompt the aesthete to consider more seriously some intrinsic values that he already recognized as potentially worth caring about for their own sake.

loves her" (72). The fruits of ethically secured romantic love cannot become the primary motive for accepting a duty towards one's beloved, even though the fruits are very important.<sup>20</sup>

Hence the Judge claims that only an agent who gives priority to ethical goods as *final ends* can extend and renew his or her initially erotic love in the new form of (lifelong) personal fidelity. This is a reason to take ethical ideals seriously; but ethical commitment to one's beloved requires projecting new motivation that cannot be transferred instrumentally from a desire for a meaningful life. The preservation of erotic interest and pathos within ethical commitment is a consequent confirmation of the richness of ethical life. Wilhelm intends his portrait of aesthetic goods *aufgehoben* within ethically-based cares to provide *A* with a reason to will a more embracing and overriding goal for his life — that is, to 'project' a final end of a distinctive sort that will be new to *A*'s motive-set.<sup>21</sup> His strategy is to shift *A*'s attention by showing him how goods of first love, which *A* already appreciates, are transformed and enobled within a larger way of being that *A* has previously mis-imagined as rigid, monotonous drudgery.<sup>22</sup> To test my restat-

<sup>20</sup> In particular, Wilhelm discourses on the irreplaceable value and wonder of children (72–76), emphasizing that when seen through the God-relationship, the child is not the parents' possession (73) — agreeing with Kierkegaard's own emphasis on the *alterity* of the loved one in agape-purified special loves. His descriptions of the child as miracle (76) even anticipate to some extent Silento's characterization of Isaac in *Fear and Trembling*.

<sup>21</sup> Adding to the confusion, in my 1995 essay, I described Kierkegaard as agreeing with Korsgaard's notion of "metaethical internalism", which refers to the idea that the *rightness* of an action, or our sense of its moral necessity, should be our (main) reason for doing it (or intending to do it); see Korsgaard 1996, 49–76. For example, she says "the action is called for or demanded by the situation, and that is the motive for doing it" (49). But Korsgaard did not distinguish this idea, which she convincingly argues is crucial for understanding moral motivation on rationalist moral theories, from the *reasons-internalist* thesis that the rightness or value of some option for us depends on our prior desires, or from the motivational judgment-internalist idea that our moral judgments must motivate us. These distinctions were not all developed in the 1980s. Note that a reasons-externalist, who holds that there are some practical reasons the normative force of which does not depend on prior motives, could also agree with Korsgaard that a moral reason, which may presently be external to the agent's motive-set, should become her main motive for doing the action it recommends: this simply requires the reasons-externalist to accept my proposal that the agent can *make* that external reason motivating for her in willing to act on it — volitionally internalizing it. In 1995, I conflated this idea, which is a form of reasons-*"externalism"*, with Korsgaard's internalism-of-moral-reasons-to-moral-motives thesis and with Kant's Incorporation Principle.

<sup>22</sup> In other words, when an agent attends to some good *X* that is associated in some way with another good *Y*, it may be possible to shift her attention from *X* to *Y*, though she will at first attend to *Y* as an external practical reason.

ed analysis of the stage-transition, we can take up a few of the Judge's key points about love.

### 10.3 From Erotic to Romantic Love, and on to Marital Love

Wilhelm aims to show the superiority of ethical existence by arguing for the Compatibility and Completion theses: the development of "first love" will illustrate how an aesthetic agent can enter the ethical sphere. As we saw, he supports the Compatibility thesis by arguing that erotic love is the sole appropriate (primary) motive for marriage: he counsels against looking for other reasons to marry extrinsic to love (63). He fears that his age has "annihilated romantic love" (19) and replaced it with sagacity, so that "many marriages are entered into without the deeper eroticism that surely is the most beautiful aspect of purely human existence" (30). He also argues that the values appreciated in our romantic emotions extend beyond sensuous beauty to another kind of "beauty that can be conceived through and in and with the sensuous [...]" but in such a way that, continually on the point of manifesting itself, it peeks out through it" (i.e. through the sensuous) (21). Such psychic beauty, as I call it, is imaginatively disclosed in visceral affects, emotions, and thoughts experienced by the other person, along with her or his responses. This inner beauty in the other's embodied mind inclines romantic love towards continuity, giving it an "analogy to the moral, in the presumed eternity which enobles and saves it from the merely sensuous" (Ibid). In other words, romantic love is not mere animal lust; it discloses other aesthetic values inhering in the psyche and spirit of the other person. In *Stages*, the Judge describes such "veiled" beauty as a mystery that we should accept in wonder rather than trying to decode (SLW, 123). There should be no critical analysis of this mystery of embodied beauty: "I observe a portrait, a statute, in that way, not a wife" (SLW, 125). In their uniqueness, individual persons always transcend their iterable properties, and it is a mark of agape to appreciate this.

*Compatibility*. Yet Wilhelm is far from holding that erotic love can perpetuate itself, or that a lover can remain loyal to such a deeper psycho-physical beauty simply by his own efforts. More cynical romantics like Byron recognize the problem that dependence on the immediacy of sensuous beauty grounds erotic attraction on fleeting contingencies. This seems to put marital love, with its duty of continuation in fidelity, at odds with an erotic fascination that must eventually disappear; and this reflective doubt seems to require an altogether different basis for marriage. But is such a higher basis something that can or "cannot

promptly enter into combination with first love" as erotic (30, compare 34)?<sup>23</sup> The Judge conceives this challenge in a way that parallels *de Silentio's* hypothetical theses in *Fear in Trembling*, e.g. that if there is no singular relation to God, then Hegel is correct in viewing ethical life as the highest; hence if Hegel is wrong, then the ethical can be suspended in faith, or "preserved in the higher" telos of salvation through faith (FT, 54). Analogously, Wilhelm says that "if marital love has no place within itself for the eroticism of first love, then Christianity is not the highest development of the human race" (EOII, 31), because pagan eros is untranscended; so by transposition, if Christianity is correct, then marital love *can* sublimate the aesthetic goods of first love (36). This comparison does not mean that Wilhelm understands faith as well as *Silentio* does; Wilhelm largely conflates the ethical and religious in all his works. But the comparison of Wilhelm's sublation to *Silentio's* reflects Kierkegaard's own view that the religious life-orientation must retain both ethical and aesthetic devotions within it.<sup>24</sup>

The Judge's Compatibility thesis thus requires that a cumulative combination or sublation of eros within marriage is possible through a life-commitment raised to the status of moral duty. He writes that for marriage,

the real constituting element, the substance, is love [*Kjerlighed*] – or, if you want to give it more specific emphasis, erotic love [*Elskov*] [...] love, whether it is the superstitious, romantic, chivalrous love or the deeper moral, religious love filled with a vigorous and vital connection, has precisely the qualification of eternity in it (32).

It is striking how the Judge here implies that erotic love can live within, or even be an expression of, the same type of spiritual or volitional love that Kierkegaard later describes in his own voice as agapic in *Works of Love*, i.e. *Kjerlighed*: "Love for the neighbor has [...] the qualifications of eternity" (WL, 65), because it can continue and persevere despite changes in the one loved. In *Stages*, the Judge notes "the divine equality of the religious", or inner equality between husband and wife (SLW, 168–69; compare 124). He also stresses the wedding ceremony's command to the couple that "they shall love one another" and emphasizes the joy of having this "eternal duty" (SLW, 111) – clearly anticipating the language of *Works of Love*. Agapic regard loves the other as spirit, as a unique individual (WL, 68–69), and involves an act of will (WL, 81). Wilhelm also anticipates the

key contrast in *Works of Love*: both the merit and defect in "earthly love" is its preference, culminating in "love only for one single human being in the whole world"; while "Spiritual love has no preference", and grows towards loving all (62). But this does not make them incompatible; for in marriage, one loves the spouse as a spiritual being bearing the watermark of God while also loving her/him as an embodied being with aesthetic value: "Thus marriage is sensual but also spiritual, free and also necessary", and even anticipates a transformed union in "another life" (*ibid.*). Kierkegaard agrees when he writes that in "erotic love and friendship" we can also "preserve love for the neighbor", and even describes these earthly loves as a "noble fire within a person" that can lead to agapic love (WL, 62). For Christianity does not hate "erotic love as the sensuous"; rather the teachings against "the sensuous, the flesh" refer to "selfishness" (WL, 52), which we see in earthly loves that treat the other as property or as mere instruments for our use. Wilhelm says precisely the same thing: Christianity teaches that there is a "discord between the flesh and the spirit, but the flesh is not the sensuous [as eros] – it is the selfish" (EOII, 49). The Church does not describe sex itself, or enjoyment of sensual beauty *per se*, as a sin (EOII, 91). Thus spiritual love, agapic regard, can permeate eros and philia to keep their natural tendency to jealousy and possessiveness in check (WL, 54),<sup>25</sup> as well as constituting a free response to natural inclinations resulting in a more autonomous devotion to the other (WL, 56).

Thus Kierkegaard held that "spirit's love" can infuse the natural loves, or "lie at the base of and be present in every other expression of love" (WL, 146).<sup>26</sup> It is strongly reminiscent of Judge Wilhelm when he advises: "love the beloved" (WL, 146).<sup>27</sup>

25 Amy Hall misrepresents *Works of Love* on this issue (Hall 2002, 114). As evidence against Wilhelm's idea that erotic love can be ennobled by Christian marriage, she quotes a section of II.B where Kierkegaard contrasts neighbor-love and the special loves, and adds that it is "bungling and confusion" to argue that "Christianity does indeed teach a higher love but in addition praises erotic love and friendship" (WL, 45). But Kierkegaard's point here is manifestly that we should not defend a *heterogenous* amalgam or conceive agapic and erotic love like more and less expensive alternatives on a buffet menu, "like a shopkeeper who carries the best grade of some good but in addition has a medium grade" (*ibid.*). That is why purified erotic love, friendship, and love of family must have agapic regard *within* them, not as a separate add-on. Kierkegaard's point, then, *actually supports* the Judge's thesis that erotic love cannot stand adequately by itself, but needs to be ennobled by duty-love.

26 By the time of his last works, Kierkegaard did lose this conviction that held from *Either/Or* through *Works of Love*. *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, and even into *Christian Discourses* (see CD, 242). In *Judge for Yourself* for example, he suggests that "Christianity prefers the single state", though his critics will blame a bachelor for saying it (JFY 139). *Practice in Christianity* explains this by suggesting that a spouse, like a friend, may discourage one from the

<sup>23</sup> The Judge characterizes "the religious" here as a higher principle in a way that anticipates the central idea of faith in *Fear and Trembling* – namely that "nothing is impossible for God" (30).

<sup>24</sup> Note that Wilhelm also says here that "every individual in the generation begins his life from the beginning" (EOII, 31), anticipating a key thesis in *The Concept of Anxiety*.



loved faithfully and tenderly, but let love for the neighbor be the sanctifying element in your union's covenant with God" (WL, 62). We might still question how this combination can work; but the Judge's account offers some further clues. Young A believes that erotic emotion and dutiful love are incompatible because he thinks that "feelings can never be commanded", as Green puts it (Green 1995, 147). But, following Schrader, Green notes Kierkegaard's contrary view that a couple can use imagination and effort "to express, rejuvenate, and transfigure the aesthetic-erotic-emotional side of their relationship." (Ibid, 149, citing George Schrader 1968) As Climacus says in his commentary on the Judge's account, "inwardness in erotic love" aims at unique devotion and repetition: "to love one and the same and yet be continually renewed in the same erotic love, so that it continually flowers anew in mood and exuberance" (CUP 259–60). The Compatibility thesis, and the related Infusion thesis, may then depend on connections between will and emotions.

Finally, Wilhelm argues that if we assert the incompatibility or "separation of erotic love and marriage", we face a dilemma. Either we accept that "erotic love cannot be preserved at all" (which even A will disdain as weak or insipid) or we imagine that its continuation is somehow threatened by the duty involved in marriage, without which eros stands a better chance of battling "through life vicariously" (EOII, 34). Against the latter horn, Wilhelm argues that erotic love naturally leads beyond its own resources. Yet to understand this will require an intermediate step explaining why eros leads to romantic emotion and caring.

*Completion:* Wilhelm offers evidence from experience for erotic love's *incompleteness*: the idea that the erotically moved person can perpetuate his love by his own efforts alone refers us "either to the untested pathos of immediate love or to the mood and whim of the individual, who would feel able to finish the course under his own power" (34). This is hubris comparable to positive de-

---

sacrifices and efforts needed to do good works in service of God and witness to Christ (PC 117–18) – though this would be flawed forms of conjugal or friendship-love that do not encourage the beloved's agapic devotions to strangers, the downtrodden, the sick, and the poor, as opposed to more ennobled forms of romantic love and philia. By the point of *The Moment* No. 7, Kierkegaard has decided that marriage and sex are bad because the begetting of children condemns new people to suffer in a fallen world (TM, 245–48). Describing this late shift away from his former "dialectical balance" between finite goods and the absolute, Sylvia Walsh notes Marie Thulstrup's argument that "in his very last publication [...] Kierkegaard came to view evil as lying not only in the human heart but also as forming the very law of nature, making it unthinkable for a Christian to marry and have children" – see Walsh 2005, 107, citing Thulstrup 1955, 42–54. Relative to this late life-hating despair, the Judge offers us a crucial reminder of the much better Kierkegaard who recognized that if he had had faith, he would have married Regine.

spair or "defiance" as described by Anti-Climacus, which is rendered unstable by refusing any objective ground outside the individual's arbitrary will (SUD, 68): for we cannot "bestow infinite interest and significance" on our goals just by willing them for the sake of self-assertion (SUD, 69). On the contrary, our will must respond to real values apprehended outside ourselves. Erotic love is a response to one kind of value, but a passive one: it "has no actuality"; it "merely lives on the sweet pastry of possibility", because it involves no commitment. Thus an aesthetic couple's relationship is hollow beneath its "infatuated gestures"; these "movements are devoid of [earnest] content" (35). Without commitment, aesthetic love is recognizably lacking a deeper sort of meaning. The Judge offers many other examples of the same problem: for instance, later he tells A that his refusal to accept any responsibility for others keeps them at a distance even when A helps them: "no one confides in you", and if someone appears to confide a bit, "it still would never truly mean anything, neither for you nor for him [...] because he would sense the arbitrariness implicit in confiding in you" (85–86). In short, A enjoys no true I-Thou encounters, and so he is reduced to more superficial interchanges.

Yet insofar as it transcends mere physical attraction, aesthetic love desires a continuation that it cannot assure itself. This is what the Judge means when he praises "first love" as something more than merely an earliest experience of erotic interest, something pregnant with the possibility of deeper meaning: "the first contains the promise of the future" and should be "the motivating, the infinite impulse" to something beyond it, a present moment that is "continually unfolding and rejuvenating" (39).<sup>27</sup> As Randall Colton puts it, "first love contains within itself a desire to last beyond the moment" – and beyond some trivial duration like "the next 10 days" as well.<sup>28</sup> If an experience of novelty does not inspire to continuity, this is partly the individual's own fault (40). Thus even if the individual is unlucky in first love, its spirit can reappear in "the second, the third, the

---

<sup>27</sup> Wilhelm also refers here to the "first sin" of Adam and Eve, but notes that this kind of "first" cannot prompt continuation or repetition because "it is the nature of evil not to have continuity" (40–41) – thus anticipating a crucial theme in *The Concept of Anxiety*. There we learn that although sin can predispose future sin, that is not by way of a willed devotion to something higher that enables authentic repetition.

<sup>28</sup> Colton 2013, 165. However, I think Colton errs when he says that "the Judge explicitly denies that the inner history of a marriage, that is, of a life lived ethically, can be represented in any way, even as a story" (167). On the contrary, Wilhelm's claim is that a history of daily repetition of prosaic tasks and renewal of love in marriage would lack the poetic attractions of a good fictional novel (17–19) – but remember that a person's *living narrative* does not need the aesthetic qualities of an ultra-dramatic plot line.

last"; for "here the first love has the qualification of eternity" (41). In other words, the possibility of authentic romance can be renewed after prior failure.

Until now, I have used the terms "erotic" and "romantic" interchangeably, as do the Hongs in their translation. But what the Judge means by "first love" is romantic love in a distinctive sense: it is "an absolute awakening" to a single other person in her uniqueness, inspiring essentially particularistic devotion or "unswerving knightly faithfulness" (FOII, 42–43) — like the love of the young lad for his princess in *Fear and Trembling*. Such an awakening involves a sense of deeper mystery in the other to which Don Juan is blind, and an inward response to its nobility (thus the "knighthood" metaphor, as we saw). From hereon, I will reserve the "romantic" label for this higher kind of erotic love with an emotional anticipation of continued devotion; romantic love includes a free response to passive erotic interest, and thus involves an enduring change in the lover (43, compare 45). Wilhelm, typically, presents this in paradoxical form: "the individual feels drawn by an irresistible power to another but precisely therein feels his freedom" (45). Such a combination is possible when the agent endorses her love or wills it to continue: it is then personally authoritative for her. As Wilhelm emphasizes, such identification with one's love need not be reflectively articulated: "the work of willing to hold fast to this love" is done prereflectively in the knightly lover, so the erotic is not lost; "and yet it is drawn up into the ethical by the good intention" (47). In his later "Reflections on Marriage", the Judge describes this as a "resolution" that rescues the lover from "becoming a connoisseur" (SLW, 163) like Johannes the Seducer, who responds to higher psychic forms of beauty but without any devotion to a single beloved.

Active romantic love thus points beyond the erotic to a higher *telos*. It is a *bridge from the aesthetic to the ethical* because it grows out of the individual's response to his erotic feelings; he becomes what I have called a "heroic" or knightly aesthete devoted to a more objective and subtle kind of beauty uniquely qualified by another's spirit, e.g. as when *A* perceives in his beloved "a desire in her soul that makes her beauty interesting" (51). Wilhelm paints a scene for *A* in vivid detail so that *A* may imagine himself falling in romantic love with a young woman "whose love I feel could tear me out of all my confusion and give me rebirth" (52–53). *A* would then imagine his own volitional response to such beauty and goodness in another — until he is challenged by the thought that God must seal the bond (53). Like Kierkegaard in *Works of Love*, Wilhelm then argues that God must link the partners in married love (53–55), implying that conjugal love is a sort of synthesis of romantic and neighbor-love. Wilhelm does not distinguish clearly between the universal-ethical and God as an absolute Person who promises eschatological fulfillments, but his argument is forceful nevertheless. It must shock *A* that "a third power", God as the middle term, is needed to

make faithful romantic devotion binding (52, 55);<sup>29</sup> but Wilhelm expects *A* to accept his imaginary description of *A*'s erotic love, which *A* would "beseech all the powers in heaven and earth" to maintain: "you hereby already manifest a need to seek a higher point of departure for your love" (54). Thus romantic first love naturally seeks a way to bind its truth, or to make its continuation "an obligation". Young *A* has this need to make his first love eternal, but he refuses to satisfy it: "therefore the death of your love is certain" Wilhelm tells him (57). This is the proof of its practical incompleteness.

There is another way to explain this result. The couple faces the dilemma of *precommitment* (as it is called in recent psychology): how can our present decision effectively bind us in perpetuity (which is what players need to escape certain obstacles to cooperation)?<sup>30</sup> Wilhelm's point is like one from contemporary game theory: the lovers' promise or oath can only bind them as they wish if it is "an obligation they impose upon themselves face to face with a higher power" (56). In other words, the binding commitment that reciprocated romantic love wills can be (executively) autonomous, but only if it also has an *authoritative basis* outside the lovers' wills, i.e. one that the lovers cannot later ignore 'at will'. They do not initially see this: for the goodness in their first love makes anything by which they might swear loyalty seem real enough, but this is illusory; swearing "by the moon" cannot survive reflection (56). That does not mean they need a Hobbesian sovereign to threaten them. Rather, the lovers need a *justification* for their love that will *endure*: to make their oath eternally binding as they wish, they must give it a basis with objective validity — an eternal standard to

<sup>29</sup> One of Amy Hall's most egregious misrepresentations of the text and Wilhelm's character bears on this theme. She says he is conveniently uncritical in assuming that the lover's erotic interest is "innocent" and so can be baptized by "religious gratitude". So "William's God does not, as he so revealing puts it, 'cramp one's style'. This version of Christianity confronts neither *A*'s nor his own predilection to see a woman as a source of pleasure" (Hall 2002, 114). Yet consider the actual passage and its context: the Judge tells *A* that "God, to use a somewhat frivolous expression, is an eyewitness who does not cramp one's style. But that God must not know about it, this is selfishness and reflection" (56). Wilhelm's point is precisely that *A*'s love is too objectifying, too willing to treat his beloved as a mere means to "the interesting". That God as middle term does not "cramp one's style" means simply that God is not like a peeping Tom invading the lovers' privacy as *A* would imagine: the lovers have no reason to be offended, because God endorses rather than rejects their intimacy. By contrast, Hall's critique assumes that any erotic interest in another person must be misappropriative, using, or objectifying.

<sup>30</sup> As Wilhelm notes in *Stages*, while "resolution is the true beginning of freedom", by itself it is an ideal: "I have the resolution before I begin to act in virtue of the resolution" (SLW, 161–62). In follow-through, the knight is bound to face obstacles, which is why he must turn to God, relating to God through the universal (SLW, 163–64).

which "will, decision, intention" properly respond (58). The only such ground we know, the Judge points out, is ethical obligation:

duty penetrates the whole body of existence to the uttermost extremity and prepares the way and gives the assurance that in all eternity no obstacle will be able to disturb love (59).

In sum, what the lovers need is to swear by an *eternal authority* that can justify their continuing devotion, and give it the seal of permanent obligation to one another. And that is marriage:

when the lovers refer their love to God, this thanks will place an absolute stamp of eternity on upon it, upon the intention and the obligation also, and this eternity will be grounded not on obscure forces but on the eternal itself (58).

We can also understand the point in terms of a telos for marriage. Having argued that the best marriages are for their own sake, or for the sake of love (63), Wilhelm adds that "There is only one true 'why', but it also has an intrinsic, infinite energy and power that can quell all 'hows'" (63–64). Like Kierkegaard in the "Purity of Heart" discourse, Wilhelm holds that only the infinite good is a sufficient justification or basis. Marriage ennobles us with an infinite, inexhaustible responsibility that can be the basis for wholeness of heart (SLW, 114–17). Acknowledging this allows the true lover to humble himself before God and recognize his beloved as a *gift from God*, rather than as "booty" of a conquest (EOLII, 57; compare SLW, 121). In other words, ethically transfigured romantic love loses the possessive pride that can make it selfish: it is purified in the way that *Works of Love* requires for agapic regard to be expressed in and through romantic love.

#### 10.4 Conclusion: Love and Narrative Unity

The Judge's argument to A, then, is a practical type of transcendental deduction.<sup>31</sup> It starts from the observation that (1) erotic love takes on an existentially richer meaning when "first love" turns into romantic devotion. (2) But such romantic focus on the non-fungible individual, the beauty of a unique spirit beneath and within the fungible sensual qualities, can be fulfilled only through as-

<sup>31</sup> As Ronald Green convincingly argues. I interpret Wilhelm's deduction slightly differently, since Green emphasizes the parallel with Kant's ought-implies-can deduction in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, suggesting that the duty involved in marriage implies for Wilhelm that we can maintain erotic interest or romantic intimacy in our relationship if we work at it (Green 1995, 151–52).

urance of lasting continuity. (3) Thus reciprocating romantic lovers must seek a kind of precommitment to remain loyal to their mutual love forever, i.e. a successful "oath": this is the highest expression of what they feel and what they will for each other, so they naturally seek to make such a troth. (4) But an oath cannot bind – i.e. cannot actually precommit their wills – unless it invokes an authority that can justify their love and give them duty to remain loyal. (5) Yet only eternal ethical ideals or norms offer such an authority; for the individual can always change his or her mind, just as the contingencies that initially inspire erotic feelings can alter with fortune.

Thus the aesthetic sense expressed in first love can only be completed in ethical resolution.

Eros, the most interesting of all aesthetic experiences, is most existentially valuable (or meaningful to the experiencing agent) when it becomes romantic love, as exemplified in the purity and innocence of "first love". Yet such romantic love cannot be fully meaningful in an instant: its existential value is experienced as a *narrative trajectory*, or tendency towards continuation, which can be secured only through willed devotion. The passion of romantic love may be strong, but its bubble can pop instantly upon meeting adversity (94). But our will cannot form a lasting devotion on the basis of fungible instances of aesthetic value alone: it can make a sufficiently reliable commitment only on the eternal bases of duty. To accept this is to enter the ethical stage, and thus to give one's life an "inner history", a kind of narrative continuity on the basis of cares willed to the point of infinite resignation (61), or unto death (62).

Thus the Judge proves more than the Compatibility thesis that is necessary for Christian marriage, i.e. that aesthetic goods of eros can continue within married love. In explaining how it is possible for erotic love to continue transformed within an ethically defined relationship such as marriage, Judge Wilhelm also offers compelling evidence for the stronger Completion thesis, i.e. that erotic interest is immature and superficial until it becomes romantic pathos, which in turn is unsatisfied with its insecurity until it is transformed by ethical duty. So Wilhelm recognizes and praises the value for human existence of personal relations to aesthetic goods; but he argues that such existential benefits of aesthetic devotions cannot last on their own without being taken up into the wider circle of willing informed and guided by ethical standards. In Fichtean terms, the aesthetic needs an eternal Anstoß outside itself – an immovable mast to which it can lash itself to remain on course – but it can only find this in the infinite goods that ground ethical duty.

There is no obvious step where young A can get off this path. For he is advanced enough to be enchanted by the idea of romantic love, despite his own cynicism, and he cannot deny that its own form leads romantic love to wish

for eternal continuity above all else. If *A* concedes that much, though, he will be hooked: for where else could he find a basis for assurance sufficient to satisfy romantic love's internal tendency? Even if one day it becomes possible for people to have their minds programmed to remain always in love with each other, that would be insufficient. For the lover could always think to herself later: 'I did this, having myself programmed this way, but why? It was a mere whim, because I had no good reason for it, and now it may be more convenient for me if I reverse that programming.' Only an eternal basis can save the knight of romantic love from succumbing to the fungibility that he wills to overcome for the sake of his beloved. Still, what connects the sides of this bridge from aesthetic to ethical life is simply the importance of first-personal meaning, or what I have called (agent-relative) *existential value*. Perhaps we can say that each person "desires" a fully meaningful life, and thus posit a motive essential to personhood that can explain the transition on a reasons-internalist basis. I find it more perspicuous to say that *A* should discover in the Judge's logic of love a *rational connection that justifies* him in internalizing new practical reasons that first appear to him as merely external to his extant motives.

Thus ethical values or considerations that an aesthete already knows as external reasons (probably in abstract form, thinly grasped) can gain a *new relevance* or salience for her: for they can justify her devotion, if she is willing to reconceive her love as a promise bound by obligation. To notice in this way the existential relevance of an ethical ground for action is not the same as being moved by it in the way that many goods attract. Rather, it is perceiving that this external reason could justify willing a final end that expands and completes ones that the agent already wills (on less secure grounds). Thus the model of projective willing as self-motivation in response to objective practical reasons has the resources to explain the aesthetic-to-ethical transition in a way that does not make it irrational. And the substantially modified Frankfurtian account of the "primordial choice" in the Judge's second letter stands: it is confirmed and strengthened by his remarkable defense of romantic marriage in the first letter of *Either/Or II*.

## Bibliography

- Colton, Randell 2013: "Repetition and the Fullness of Time: Gift, Task, and Narrative", in Kierkegaard's Uppbuilding Ethics, Mercer University Press  
 Davenport, John 1995: "The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical", in: Southwest Philosophy Review 11 no.2 (August), 73–108, reprinted in: Davenport / Rudd 2001, 75–112

- Davenport, John 2000: "Entangled Freedom: Ethical Authority, Original Sin, and Choice in Kierkegaard's Concept of Anxiety", in: Kierkegaardiana 21, Copenhagen, 131–51  
 Davenport, John 2001a: "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre", in: Davenport / Rudd 2001, 265–324  
 Davenport, John 2001b: "Kierkegaard, Anxiety, and the Will", in: KSYB, 158–81  
 Davenport, J. / Rudd, A. (Ed.) 2001: Kierkegaard After MacIntyre, Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co.  
 Davenport, John 2007: Will as Commitment and Resolve, Fordham University Press, 2007  
 Davenport, John 2012: Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality: From Frankfurt and MacIntyre to Kierkegaard, London / New York: Routledge  
 Davenport, John 2013: "Selfhood and Spirit", in the Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard, ed. John Lippitt and George Pattison, Oxford University Press, 2013, 230–51.  
 Davenport, John 2014: "Earnestness", in: Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome II, ed. Jon Stewart and William MacDonald, volume 15 in the series, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, 221–27.  
 Davenport, John 2015: "Kierkegaard and Frankfurt on BS, Wantonness, and Aestheticism", in: Love, Reason, and Will: Kierkegaard after Frankfurt, ed. Rudd and Davenport, Bloomsbury Publishing, 73–113  
 Davenport, John 2017: "The Integration of Neighbor-Love and Special Loves in Kierkegaard and von Hildebrand", in: Kierkegaard's God and the Good Life, ed. Stephen Minister, J. Aaron Simmons, and Michael Strawser, Indiana University Press, 46–77  
 Duckles, Ian 2005: "Kierkegaard's Irrationalism: A Response to Davenport and Rudd", in: Southwest Philosophy Review 21 no.2, 37–51  
 Ferreira, M. Jamie 2001: Love's Grateful Striving, Oxford University Press  
 Green, Ronald 1995: "Kierkegaard's Great Critique: Either/Or as a Kantian Transcendental Deduction", in: International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or, Part II, ed. Robert Perkins, Mercer University Press, 139–54  
 Gouwens, David 1996: Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker, Cambridge University Press  
 Hall, Amy Laura 2002: Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love, Cambridge University Press  
 Korsgaard, Christine 1996: "Kant's Analysis of Obligation in Foundations I", in: Korsgaard, Creating the Kingdom of Ends, Cambridge University Press, 43–76  
 Mooney, Edward 1991: Knights of Faith and Resignation, Albany: SUNY Press  
 Plekon, Michael 1995: "Judge William: Bourgeois Morality, Knight of Faith, Teacher?", in: International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or, Part II, ed. Robert Perkins: Mercer University Press, 125–38  
 Rosati, Connie 2006: "Moral Motivation", in: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (online)  
 Rudd, Anthony 1993: Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical, Oxford University Press  
 Schrader, George 1968: "Kant and Kierkegaard on Duty and Inclination", in: The Journal of Philosophy 65, 688–701  
 Thulstrup, Marie M. 1955: "Kierkegaards 'onde verden,'" in: Kierkegaardiana 1, 42–54.  
 Williams, Bernard 1988: Moral Luck, Cambridge University Press  
 Walsh, Sylvia 2005: Living Christianly, Penn State University Press

*KA*

**Klassiker Auslegen**

---

Herausgegeben von  
Otfried Höffe

**Band 67**

# **Søren Kierkegaard: Entweder – Oder**

---

Herausgegeben von  
Hermann Deuser und Markus Kleinert

**DE GRUYTER**

## Vorwort

Kierkegaards *Entweder–Oder*, sein frühes Hauptwerk von 1843, ist längst ein *Klassiker* und verdient es, als solcher *ausgelegt* zu werden. Die Bedingungen in der Kierkegaard-Forschung sind dafür günstig, weil in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten in der Verantwortung des Kierkegaard-Forschungszentrums in Kopenhagen eine extensiv und minutös kommentierte, vollständig neue Werkausgabe erarbeitet wurde: *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*. Auf dieser historisch-philologisch sicheren Basis kann die Kierkegaard-Interpretation verlässlicher und ruhiger erfolgen, falsche Schulbildungen vermeiden, ohne die Leidenschaft des Denkens und Existierens aufgeben zu müssen.

Wir haben Otfried Höffe herzlich zu danken für die Initiative und gründliche redaktionelle Betreuung zu diesem Band. Es ist nicht ganz einfach, Kierkegaards eigenwillige Literatur im Blick auch auf sein Gesamtwerk auszulegen. Denn trotz aller Forderung nach einem Entweder-Oder bleibt eine gewisse Schwebe gegenüber einer festen Systematisierung, und das beeinflusst auch die Auslegung. Unterschiedliche Sprach- und Denkformen sind also berechtigt, müssen aber gleichwohl zusammengeführt werden, um den massiven Eindruck, den diese Frühschrift Kierkegaards vermittelt, nicht einfach abzuwehren oder zu affirmieren.

Wir danken ganz besonders allen, die zu diesem Band beigetragen haben. Ohne ihre produktive und verständnisvolle Zusammenarbeit wären wir nicht vorangekommen. Das gilt ebenso für die redaktionelle Begleitung im Verlag De Gruyter, namentlich Dr. Gertrud Grünkorn, Johanna Wange und Olena Gaiulina. Für die umsichtige Zusammenstellung der Register danken wir Dr. Jan Leichsenring.

Erfurt, Juli 2017

Hermann Deuser und Markus Kleimert

ISBN 978-3-11-044484-1

e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-044502-2

e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-043729-4

ISSN 2192-4554

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

### Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

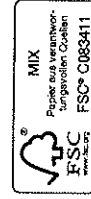
© 2017 Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston

Druck und Bindung: CPI books GmbH, Leck

© Gedruckt auf säurefreiem Papier

Printed in Germany

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)



# Inhalt

## Zitierweise und Siglen — IX

Hermann Deuser und Markus Kleinert

### 1 Einleitung — 1

Niels Jørgen Cappelørn

### 2 *Entweder – Oder* in der Strategie des Gesamtwerkes

(SKS 7, 228–273, 560–573 / SKS 13, 5–27 / SKS 16, 5–106; GW1 AUN1, 245–296 / AUN2, 331–344 / GW1 WS/GWS) — 13

Magnus Schlette

### 3 Das Vorwort von Victor Eremita: Wer hat das letzte Wort?

(EO1, 11–25; SKS 2, 11–22) — 39

Tilo Wesche

### 4 Diapsalmata (I): Kierkegaards Konzept der Kritik

(EO1, 27–55; SKS 2, 25–52) — 57

Leonardo F. Lisi

### 5 Diapsalmata (II): Nihilism as a Spiritual Exercise

(EO1, 27–55; SKS 2, 25–52; KW III, 17–43) — 75

Pierre Bühler

### 6 Die unmittelbaren erotischen Stadien oder das Musikalisch-Erotische:

Mozarts Don Juan als ästhetische Gestalt

(EO1, 57–163; SKS 2, 53–136) — 95

Angelika Jacobs

### 7 Der Reflex des antiken Tragischen in dem modernen Tragischen / Die

erste Liebe. Lustspiel in einem Akt von Scribe: Die Spur des Erhabenen

im Tragischen und Komischen

(EO1, 165–196 / 271–327; SKS 2, 137–162 / 225–270) — 111

Konrad Paul Liessmann

### 8 Schattenrisse / Das Tagebuch des Verführers: Im Schatten des Eros

(EO1, 197–254 / 351–521; SKS 2, 163–209 / 291–432) — 131

Ettore Rocca

- 9 **Der Unglücklichste / Die Wechselwirtschaft: Die Autonomie des Ästhetischen angesichts der Latgeweile**  
(EO1, 255–269 / 329–349; SKS 2, 211–223 / 271–289) — 151

John Davenport

- 10 **The Esthetic Validity of Marriage: Romantic Marriage as a Model for Ethical Will: In Defense of Judge Wilhelm**  
(EO2, 523–703; SKS 3, 13–151; KW IV, 5–154) — 169

Elisabeth Gräß-Schmidt

- 11 **Das Gleichgewicht zwischen dem Ästhetischen und dem Ethischen in der Herausarbeitung der Persönlichkeit (I): Das Versteckspiel des Lebens und der Ernst der Authentizität**  
(EO2, 704–914, bes. 704–728; SKS 3, 153–318, bes. 153–173) — 193

Anders Moe Rasmussen

- 12 **Das Gleichgewicht zwischen dem Ästhetischen und dem Ethischen in der Herausarbeitung der Persönlichkeit (II): Struktur und Kritik der ästhetischen Existenz**  
(EO2, 728–778; SKS 3, 173–210) — 213

Sergio Muñoz Fonnegra

- 13 **Das Gleichgewicht zwischen dem Ästhetischen und dem Ethischen in der Herausarbeitung der Persönlichkeit (III): Die Pflicht als Lebensform. Zur Konkretisierung der Ethik als Aufgabe des Menschen**  
(EO2, 778–914; SKS 3, 210–314) — 231

Claudia Welz

- 14 **Ultimatum: Gottesfrage, Gebet und Ethik angesichts des Theodizeeproblems**  
(EO2, 915–933; SKS 3, 315–332 / GW1 2R43; SKS 5, 9–56 / GW1 ERG, 278–302; SKS 8, 361–383) — 247

Auswahlbibliographie — 267

Hinweise zu den Autoren — 271

Personenregister — 275

Sachregister — 279

## Zitierweise und Siglen

*Entweder – Oder* (EO1: „Erster Teil. Enthaltend die Papiere von A“; EO2: „Zweiter Teil: Enthaltend die Papiere von B an A“) wird im Deutschen zitiert nach der Übersetzung von H. Fautsch, hg. von H. Diem u. W. Rest (DGW, Bd. 1), München: Dt. Taschenbuch Verlag, 11. Aufl. 2012; entsprechend im Englischen nach der Übersetzung von H.V. / E.H. Hong, in: *Kierkegaard's Writings* vol. III / IV (EO1 – II / KW III – IV), Princeton 1988. Die Belege nach der maßgeblichen dänischen Ausgabe von *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (SKS) erfolgen mit Band- und Seitenzahl.

Die Abkürzungen und Siglen anderer Werkmittel und Ausgaben richten sich nach der Vorlage der *Deutschen Søren Kierkegaard Edition* (DSKE) bzw. der *Kierkegaard Studies: Yearbook* (KSYB). Im Einzelnen sind die folgenden Siglen hervorzuheben:

- DGW *Søren Kierkegaard. Gesamtausgabe der Werke in vier Bänden*, unter Mitw. von N. Thulstrup und der Kopenhagener Kierkegaard-Gesellschaft, hg. von H. Diem und W. Rest (Köln 1951–1960), München 2005.
- DSKE *Deutsche Søren Kierkegaard Edition*, hg. von H. Anz (bis Bd. 2), N.J. Cappelørn, H. Deuser, J. Grage (ab Bd. 3), H. Schulz, Berlin / New York bzw. Boston 2005 ff.
- KSMS *Kierkegaard Studies: Monograph Series*, hg. von N.J. Cappelørn u. H. Deuser (bis Bd. 25), von H. Schulz, Jon Stewart u. K. Verstrynge (ab Bd. 26), Berlin / New York bzw. Boston 1997 ff.
- KSYB *Kierkegaard Studies: Yearbook*, hg. von N.J. Cappelørn u. H. Deuser (bis 2010), von H. Schulz, Jon Stewart u. K. Verstrynge (ab 2011), Berlin / New York bzw. Boston 1997 ff.
- SKS / *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, 55 Bde (Bd. 1–28, Kommentarb. K1-K28), hg. von N. J. Cappelørn u. a., Kopenhagen 1997–2012.
- GW1 *Søren Kierkegaard. Gesammelte Werke*, übers. und hg. von E. Hirsch, H. Gerdes und H. M. Junghans, 36 Abt. in 26 Bd. und Registerbd., Düsseldorf / Köln 1950–1969.
- 2R43 *Zwei erbauliche Reden 1843*
- AUN1–2 *Abschließende unwissenschaftliche Nachschrift*
- B *Briefe*
- BA *Der Begriff Angst*
- BI *Über den Begriff der Ironie*
- EC *Einübung im Christentum*
- ERG *Erbauliche Reden in verschiedenem Geist*
- ES *Erstlingschriften*
- GWS *Der Gesichtspunkt für meine Wirksamkeit als Schriftsteller*
- KA *Kleine Aufsätze*
- LF *Die Lilie auf dem Felde und der Vogel unter dem Himmel*
- KT *Die Krankheit zum Tode*
- RAF *Reden beim Altargang am Freitag*
- SLW *Studien auf des Lebens Weg*
- V *Vorworte*
- WS *Über meine Wirksamkeit als Schriftsteller*
- T 1–5 *Søren Kierkegaard. Die Tagebücher*, übers. und hg. von H. Gerdes, Bd. 1–5, Düsseldorf / Köln 1962–1974.



- KW Kierkegaard's Writings, transl. by H. V. Hong / E. H. Hong et al., vols. I – XXVI, Princeton: PUP 1978 – 2000
- CI *The Concept of Irony*  
 CD *Christian Discourses*  
 CUP *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*  
 EO1–II *Either / Or*  
 FT *Fear and Trembling*  
 JY *Judge for Yourself*  
 PC *Practice in Christianity*  
 SUW *Stages on Life's Way*  
 SUD *The Sickness unto Death*  
 UDVS *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*  
 TM *The Moment*  
 WL *Works of Love*
- Pap. Søren Kierkegaards Papirer, Bd. I – XI,3, hg. von P. A. Heiberg, V. Kühr und E. Torsting, Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, Kopenhagen 1909 – 1948; Zweite vermehrte Ausgabe, von N. Thulstrup, Bd. XII–XIII Ergänzungsbde., hg. von N. Thulstrup, Bd. XIV – XVI Index von N. J. Cappelørn, Gyldendal, Kopenhagen 1968 – 1978.

## Hermann Deuser und Markus Kleinert

### 1 Einleitung

„...an der Richtigkeit des bekannten philosophischen Satzes, dass das Äußere das Innere, das Innere das Äußere sei, ein bißchen zu zweifeln“ (EO1, 11; SKS 2, 11). Ausgespannt zwischen diesem ironischen Hegeizitat, dem Ruf des Posthorns („Der Postillion bläst bereits“ – wenn auch 1½ Stunden verspätet!) und dem zufälligen Manuskriptfund („dass eine geheime Tür aufsprang, die ich nie zuvor bemerkt hatte“ [EO1, 14; SKS 2, 13f.]) – so präsentiert der pseudonyme Herausgeber Victor Eremita die von ihm tentativ mit *Erntveder* – Oder bezeichneten Texte zweier unbekannter Autoren A und B. Oder war es vielleicht doch nur ein einziger Autor, der für diese beiden so unterschieden andersartigen Sammlungen verantwortlich zeichnet? Hinzu kommt noch eine dritte Autorschaft, was zu Beginn gar nicht erwähnt wird, nämlich der von B mitgegebene Predigttext des *Ultimatums*, gleichsam die knappe Coda eines vorausgegangenen Feuerwerks von Gedanken und Gattungen, vom Aphorismus bis zum weit ausholenden Lehrbrief: im Ganzen ein „Lebensfragment“ (EO1, 9; SKS 2, 9).

Derart durchsetzt von spielerischen Elementen stellt sich eine Philosophie der Lebensanschauungen, der Lebensformen und Handlungssituationen dar. Ihre lehrhaften und analytischen Passagen erscheinen immer zusammen mit romanhaften Vermittlungsformen; man könnte von einer Art Bildungsroman sprechen, wenn auch nicht gleich – mit Odo Marquards ironischem Begriff – von „Transzendentalbelletristik“ (Marquard 2013, 121). Allerdings, Kierkegaards bewundernswerte literarische Fähigkeiten verbunden mit der werkeinheitlichen Progranformel, „was es denn heißt zu existieren“, unterschreiten keineswegs die Erwartungen an das, was heute unter Philosophie verstanden werden kann (Hannay 2010, 37, 46). In historischer Sicht ist Kierkegaards Stellung zu Wissenschaft und Lebensnähe immer wieder und zu Recht mit Schopenhauer und Nietzsche verglichen worden, und die von der Kierkegaard-Lektüre ausgehenden literarischen Einflüsse und Vergleichsmöglichkeiten („with contemporaries like Ionesco and Beckett, or even Monty Python“) liegen auf der Hand. „Philosophisch“ (Hannay 2010, 35f., 45) aber ist vor allem die begriffliche Arbeit am Ort der existentiellen Fragestellung selbst: „es gilt, eine Wahrheit zu finden, die Wahrheit für mich ist, die Idee zu finden, für die ich leben und sterben will“ (DSKE 1, 24). Hier differenzieren sich die Lebensformen des Ästhetischen, Ethischen und Religiösen, und diese müssen in ihren jeweiligen Lebensbedingungen so zur Sprache und Darstellung gebracht werden, dass sie der existentiellen Aneignung nicht im Wege stehen, sondern immer auch auf diese schwierige Umsetzungsproblematik aufmerksam machen. Das verlangt neue Begriffsbildungen, unverbrauchte Katego-