

‘Entangled Freedom’

Ethical Authority, Original Sin, and Choice in Kierkegaard’s *Concept of Anxiety*¹

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Introduction: Choice and Authority in *Either/Or*

In Kierkegaard circles, there is currently a lively discussion of Kierkegaard’s concept of ethical authority, prompted in part by Alasdair MacIntyre’s argument in *After Virtue* that »the transition from an aesthetic to an ethical view of existence« can only be made by an arbitrary or »criterionless choice,« as Marilyn Piety puts it.² Like Piety, Anthony Rudd,³ George Stack,⁴ Alastair Hannay,⁵ Timothy Jackson,⁶ and others, I have argued in an earlier article that MacIntyre is wrong to construe the ‘primordial choice’ to be an agent who chooses in ethical consciousness as an act of *arbitrary* freedom.⁷ Drawing on Harry Frankfurt’s analysis of *higher-order* volitions through which persons ‘identify’ with some desires or motives for acting while alienating others,⁸ I argued that the ‘primordial choice’ Judge William describes in *Either/Or II* can be interpreted as the choice to engage in such identification or to form an ‘inner character’ consisting patterns of higher-order volitions.⁹ Therefore the primordial choice to become a chooser-in-the-ethical-sense does not generate the *authority* of ethical principles for the individual, as MacIntyre assumes, but rather gives the distinctions of good and evil character a personal relevance within the individual’s life. But the objective authority of the agent’s conscience – or her cognitive access to ethical values and standards of moral worth – does not *derive* from her original choice to be a ‘chooser.’ Rather, the aesthete at some point in life *cognitively awakens* usually through some crisis, or through being challenged by other persons¹⁰ – to a primordial responsibility to decide what kind of person to be, or to commit inwardly to acting on motives that reflect what he most cares

about, rather than merely drifting along and letting his intentions be determined by the relative strength of opposing appetites and inclinations as they vary over time, without unity or order. At this point, the awakened aesthete must in one way or another make a primordial choice between the aesthetic and the ethical modes of existence, but it is hardly an arbitrary one. Contra MacIntyre, awareness of the force of moral norms, including the ability to make them one's own as guides for action, is possible for 'awakened' aesthetes. Moreover, since past this point one cannot consciously return to unawakened immediacy, if he chooses the aesthetic, he enters into sin instead.¹¹

My goal in this paper is to look at how Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety* sheds light on this question about ethical authority and choice in *Either/Or II*. I argue that the *Concept of Anxiety* portrays the story of the Fall in *Genesis* as a paradigm of the aesthetic-ethical transition. Thus the analysis of anxiety's role in original sin helps explain why the freedom of choice involved in this transition is not an empty, arbitrary, or voluntarist indeterminism.¹²

The Universalization of 'First Sin' in *The Concept of Anxiety*, Chapter I.

In *The Concept of Anxiety*,¹³ Kierkegaard's pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis ('VH' for short) articulates a radically new position on original sin, which rejects both traditional Catholic and Protestant interpretations in favor of one that, at least in my view, makes more sense ethically.¹⁴ This innovation is not simply a result of the pseudonym's psychological approach to sin by way of its ambiguous antecedents,¹⁵ but is motivated by Kierkegaard's own ethical concern that the traditional interpretations of original sin encourage the attitude that we are not really 'at fault' for our moral imperfection, since as a general condition sinfulness is Adam's fault. To avoid this error, VH first distinguishes between 'sinfulness' as a dispositional state constituted by the volitional possibility of sin,¹⁶ and the 'first sin' in which an individual actualizes this salient possibility: »The new quality appears with the first [sin], with the leap, with the suddenness of the enigmatic« (*CA* 30; *SVI* 4, 303).¹⁷ Corresponding to this distinction is a division of labor between 'dogmatic' or religious ethics, which presupposes the possibility of sin and deals with its actual »manifestation,

but not with its coming into existence« (CA 21; SV1 4, 294), and psychology, which can illuminate the subjective experiences of sinfulness but cannot explain the final emergence of actual sin, since that is 'not a state' or disposition but rather an act (CA 15; SV1 4, 287):¹⁸

The subject of which psychology treats must be something (...) that remains in a restless repose (...) But this abiding something out of which sin constantly arises, not by necessity (for becoming by necessity is a state (...)) but by freedom – this abiding something, this predisposing something, sin's *real* possibility, is a subject of interest for psychology (CA 21; SV1 4, 294 – my italics).

Employing this distinction, VH then argues against the doctrine that the original sinfulness which precedes 'first sin' in us is itself the result of Adam's first sin. On the contrary, he maintains that »Just as Adam lost innocence by guilt, so every man loses it in the same way« (CA 35; SV1 4, 307), i.e. in his *own* rather than Adam's first sin:

It is not in the interest of ethics to make all men except Adam into concerned and interested spectators of guiltiness but not participants in guiltiness, nor is it in the interest of dogmatics to make all men interested and sympathetic spectators of the Atonement but not participants in the Atonement (CA 36; SV1 4, 308).

In accordance with this statement, VH presents two distinguishable arguments against a hereditary source of sinfulness: an ethical argument, and an existential argument about the historicity of persons, which is crucial for Christian religiousness. The first argument is based on the injustice of making Adam superlatively sinful, i.e. making him an agent who, starting from an imaginary perfect innocence, sins directly against God and thereby causes us *not* to begin with the same qualitative advantage that he had:

Through the first sin, sin came into the world. Precisely in the same way it is true of every subsequent man's first sin, that through it sin comes into the world. That it was not in the world before Adam's first sin is, in relation to sin itself, something entirely accidental and irrelevant. It is of no significance and cannot justify making Adam's sin greater or the first sin of every other man lesser (CA 31; SV1 4, 303).

As I read it, this argument implicitly appeals to the main tenets of the agapeistic ethics which Kierkegaard later articulates in *Works of Love*. For it is contrary to his religious ethics to make an exception which excludes anyone, including Adam, from the universal sphere of humanity, in which every neighbor is equal in worth before God.¹⁹ The interpretation that takes Adam as the cause of all future sinfulness makes him essentially unequal to us, an agent of transcendent turpitude. Thus this traditional interpretation is false. This argument has an *edifying* function, since it denies that the ‘quantitative’ accumulation of sinfulness in the history of human culture determines the qualitative leap in which each new person freely sins for the first time: »If every subsequent man’s first sin were thus brought about by [historical/inherited] sinfulness, his first sin would only in a nonessential way be qualified as first« (CA 31; SV1 4, 303). By contrast, VH’s conception puts the responsibility squarely back on each individual, making all of us Adam’s equal: »innocence is always lost only by the qualitative leap of the individual« (CA 37; SV1 4, 309). As Gordon Marino says, Kierkegaard here rejects the idea that we are ‘innately corrupt,’ since this makes individual responsibility impossible.²⁰

Yet VH is at pains to insist that this view does not amount to the isolationist individuality of Pelegianism, which abstracts individual freedom from history (CA 34; SV1 4, 306). So his second argument focuses on the idea that if »the particular individual participates in inherited sin only through his relation to Adam and not through his primitive relation to sin,« then Adam would be »placed fantastically outside history« (CA 26; SV1 4, 298). Against this, VH argues that individuality and historical connection to others are united in human personhood.²¹ The idea here is difficult, but importantly linked to the idea of a ‘repetition’ that is not a simple reinstantiation of the same. Because each individual adds to the history of the race »by the qualitative leap,« every person »begins anew with the race«²² and is more than an »empty repetition« (CA 33f.; SV1 4, 305f.). But because each person is also ‘descended’ or temporally related to others, their freedom which introduces novelty is not ahistorically isolated, but is *affected* by the past and affects the future possibilities of the race (CA 34; SV1 4, 306). Out of this individual historicity arises the history of the race,²³ which transcends the individual and does not begin anew with each person.²⁴ As VH says later in chapter two,

Christianity has never assented to giving each particular individual the privilege of starting from the beginning *in an external sense*. Each indi-

vidual begins in a historical nexus, and the consequences of nature still hold true (*CA* 73; *SVI* 4, 342 – my italics).

This 'external' difference between our situation and Adam's includes the effects of past sin, such as that 'sensuousness' acquired the connotation of sinfulness (*CA* 73; *SVI* 4, 342). Thus freedom and temporal connection go together and the person's individuality consists partly in her *historical* uniqueness: »no individual begins at the same place as another, but every individual begins anew« (*CA* 34–35; *SVI* 4, 306). Moreover, this existential argument from historicity dovetails with the ethical argument. Since each person's individuality derives in part from the uniqueness of her historical relations, and the 'quantitative' historical progression affects (yet without determining) her freedom.²⁵

Every individual is essentially interested in the history of all other individuals, and just as essentially in his own. Perfection in oneself is therefore the perfect participation in the whole. No individual is indifferent to the history of the race any more than the race is indifferent to the history of the individual (*CA* 29; *SVI* 4, 301).

This passage, which anticipates several themes in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*,²⁶ suggests that the historicity of human individuality is the existential ground of Kierkegaard's agape ethics.²⁷ On the basis of this historicity, VH mounts an argument by dilemma. (1) If Adam is not an historical individual, whose life is able to affect the history of the race like any other, then »the race has its beginning with an individual who is not an individual« (*CA* 33; *SVI* 4, 305). This is a contradiction, because the race cannot be historical if Adam is not. (2) But if Adam does have a historical role, then it cannot be merely to *determine* future sinfulness in the race, because then Adam would be historical but the race would not: it would not consist of temporally related agents who begin qualitatively anew in their individual freedom, but would instead be a *substance* extended in time, or natural kind (like an animal species)²⁸ rather than a 'race,' which is essentially historical.²⁹ So the historicity of human existence entails that the first human being could only be another historical individual equal to all others, affecting the race by his or her history but not determining its subsequent individual members or fixing their 'nature' as particular instances of a species.

Since this falsifies the orthodox doctrine that Adam's sin differs from

ours because »Adam's sin conditions sinfulness as a consequence« (CA 30; SV1 4, 302), and since VH says that we participate in 'inherited sin' through our 'primitive relation' to sin rather than through a hereditary relation to Adam (CA 26; SV1 4, 298), we might conclude that in each person, first sin is possible because of *her own* prior 'sinfulness' or primitive volitional disposition to sin. Then VH's new conception would differ from the traditional picture only in denying that the preceding disposition in each is caused *by Adam*. On this reading, VH would hold that the dispositional possibility of sin in each of us is not the result of our own acts (let alone of the result of some first man's act), but is 'already there' in the very constitution of 'human nature' (CA 22; SV1 4, 294), in the temporality and finitude that makes us mortal.³⁰ This would be similar to Schelling's mythic scheme in which the possibility of evil arises from the fact that his relation to the chthonic 'Ground' of Being is different from God's relation to it. Louis Dupré describes this view as follows:

Man as the only creature to rise from this dark Ground to the full clarity of a spiritual existence displays a unique resemblance with God (...). Still while attaining individual form in the clarity of spirit man also remains attached to the indeterminate Ground from which he emerges. In God nature and spirit are indissolubly united. In man, their bond remains fragile, ever to be renewed.³¹

This conception undoubtedly had a very strong influence on Heidegger, but as Dupré argues, Kierkegaard rejects Schelling's scheme and the »romantic concept of freedom« which reduces it to a »mere feeling of 'infinite possibility'« unconnected to necessity.³² VH thus denies that 'evil desire' or 'concupiscence' is innate (CA 73; SV1 4, 342), and departs even more radically from traditional doctrine by insisting that the state of sinfulness itself properly originates in each of us with *our own* first act of sin (though paradoxically, this is still predisposed). Since sin presupposes sinfulness, but this state itself is freely adopted, »sin presupposes itself« and to be accurate, we must not say that by »Adam's first sin, sin came into the world,« but rather that »by first sin, *sinfulness* came into Adam,« just as happens with each of us (CA 32–33; SV1 4, 305 – my italics). Every individual »by his own first sin, brings *sinfulness* into the world« and the disposition of sinfulness in any given person cannot »begin in any other way than with sin« (CA 34; SV1 4, 306). As John Tanner puts it in his comparison of *The Concept of Anxiety* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*,

for Kierkegaard, Adam and Eve's »identity with the human family« does not rest on their sharing the same innate sinfulness, or »being fallen from the start, but from their distinctly human capacity to fall freely.«³³ Their story is the paradigm for the narrative of every individual's development.

Some scholars have referred to the tension here as grounds for doubting that this revisionary account of original sin is Kierkegaard's own. In an important paper, Vanessa Rumble has argued that Haufniensis »periodically dismisses the possibility of a 'sin' that is incurred without the individual's assent«³⁴ but that this more 'Kantian' treatment of original sin is undercut later in the text. For example, at one point »Haufniensis qualifies his initial declaration of the individual's responsibility for the fall into sin« by claiming that the past quantitative accumulation can produce an anxiety about the possibility which *itself constitutes sin*.³⁵ Rumble argues that these and other tensions in Haufniensis's account are meant to indicate something he himself does not see, namely that his own position as a 'watchman,' a supposedly neutral observer, is a (non-innocent) attempt to remain in the *aesthetic*, and hence itself fraught with mature anxiety (pp. 612-13). Like the ambiguous oracle on whom pagans rely,

Haufniensis's [account] oscillates between (1) claiming an absolute freedom which we assume in 'the qualitative leap' and (2) attributing the individual's 'fall' to an anxiety magnified to unbearable proportions.³⁶

Though I cannot answer all of Rumble's arguments here, it is not clear that the text really ever promotes this second alternative as she construes it. In particular, Haufniensus writes:

(...) the spirit's anxiety in assuming responsibility for sensuousness becomes a greater anxiety. At the maximum we find here the dreadful fact that *anxiety about sin produces sin*. If evil desire, concupiscence, etc. are regarded as innate in the individual, there is not the ambiguity in which the individual becomes both guilty and innocent (CA 30; SVI 4, 342).

This is meant to *defend* the paradox that sinfulness starts in our *act* and is yet predisposed without being innate; without this paradox, the innatist theory misconstrues the ambiguous status of 'innocent' or unawakened aestheticism. In our time, an innocent individual »has an historical environment in which it may become apparent that sensuousness can signify

sinfulness« (CA 30; SV1 4, 343), and thus, without really understanding it, he can develop an oversensitive fear that any immodesty will be a *sign to others* of something called 'sin'. Thus the maximum effect of the quantitative accumulation of sin in our history

corresponds to the aforementioned – that the individual in anxiety about sin brings forth sin – namely, *the individual, in anxiety not about becoming guilty, but about being regarded as guilty, becomes guilty* (CA 74–75; SV1 4, 344).

VH's point is thus that (a) historical familiarity with the relation of sensuousness to sin can give the innocent agent an anxiety about being judged as sinful by others, or seeing himself as already steeped in sin,³⁷ and (b) this anxiety itself may awaken him to the possibility of *deserving* the judgment and thus precipitate sin.³⁸ There is a terrible irony in this, as when a warning first makes salient to us to the very possibility of transgressing (CA 74; SV1 4, 343); but this still does not mean that sin is 'produced' causally, i.e. without the leap.³⁹ The first form of anxiety that predisposes sin – even as intensified in later individuals because of the effects of sin in human history – does not itself *constitute* sin, nor does it *necessitate* sin.⁴⁰ As Marino says, »under no circumstances can this presentiment, which is anxiety, determine sin.«⁴¹ Thus one can be faithful to the text without accepting Rumble's analysis.⁴²

III. The Aesthetic – Ethical Transition and Nonarbitrary Freedom

The apparent conflict between innate and self-caused accounts of sinfulness is to be resolved, I believe, by realizing that sinfulness is necessarily ambiguous for VH: it both precedes (and is presupposed by) a given sinful act, and yet it is shaped as a volitional 'disposition' by such acts. This is why the *anxiety* in which we experience sinfulness is similarly ambiguous, both preceding sin and following as a consequence from sin.⁴³ In the first sin, the two sides of this ambiguity seem to come together: as a journal entry suggests, Adam's »first sin is sinfulness« *itself*, the very disposition that »gave birth to actual sins in him« (CA 184; Pap. V B 52:4).⁴⁴ Behind this paradox stands the same conception of freedom that was op-

erative in *Either/Or II*: freedom is dispositional and dialectical, transcending substantive determination by its openness to alternatives, yet shaping by its own acts the way these options appear to the agent and their relative availability to her will.

This conception of freedom becomes clearer in light of Haufniensis's explanation of 'pre-threshold'⁴⁵ or 'objective' anxiety in the story of the Fall. Since Adam's fall is qualitatively the same as each later individual's fall, it is the model for the transition from the aesthetic to ethical mode of existence which occupied the Judge in *Either/Or II*. The problem in this transition is how to understand the 'choice' by which the ethical distinction between good and evil 'comes alive' for us, or by which we activate our 'spirit' (the self that forms and consists of continuing higher-order volitions or volitional character). Judge William phrases this in enigmatic terms as a choice by which good and evil are first posited for us precisely to follow the biblical paradox of a responsible choice through which Adam first 'comes to know' *good and evil*. While *Either/Or* focuses on the significance of this choice in abstract, the task in the *Concept of Anxiety* is to make sense of such a choice in the concrete form of original sin, and to explain why it is not arbitrary and how the agent can be responsible for it.

This comparison between Adam and the awakening aesthete is bound to seem controversial, since it suggests that existence in Eden is somehow imperfect or immature: compared to this, the Fall (despite its sinfulness) is an existential *advance*. Yet I think this was precisely Kierkegaard's way of making sense of the *Genesis* narrative. It is not only consonant with, but even required by his text: as John Tanner says with Kierkegaard and Milton in mind, »Qualified by spirit, Edenic existence seems designed specifically to be broken apart (...).«⁴⁶ In short, the Fall is a *felix culpa*.

VH emphasizes that 'innocence is ignorance' (CA 37; SV1 4, 309), specifically in the biblical sense that »man in his innocence« before the Fall has no »knowledge of the difference between good and evil« (CA 41; SV1 4, 313). In this respect, the innocent person is like the unawakened aesthete who, as I analyzed him, tacitly refrains from explicitly facing the choice between the aesthetic and ethical,⁴⁷ and therefore remains oblivious to the primordial responsibility to form higher-order volitions informed by ethical distinctions and principles. Like the aesthete, the innocent is not transparent to herself, since her spirit is 'dreaming' (CA 41; SV1 4, 313), and she experiences the possibility of her freedom as

open ‘possibility of possibility;’ the spiritual possibility of higher-order will is accessible only as an empty anxiety (CA 42; SV1 4, 313). Yet the aesthete is not *merely* wanton like an animal, since in Frankfurt’s terms she already has an implicit *highest-order* will, namely a subconscious will to avoid concrete higher-order volitions). Likewise, Kierkegaard’s innocent person is not simply spiritless; rather, her spirit is still in a kind of chrysalis stage:

Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is spirit.⁴⁸ In innocence, man is not merely animal, for if he were at any moment of his life merely animal, he would never become man. So spirit is present, but as immediate, as dreaming (CA 43; SV1 4, 315).

In other words, the *capacity* for higher-order will must be there from the beginning, in the *potentia* of a tacit highest-order volition, which in aesthetic immediacy is not yet revealed to us – a volition that is ours, but that is not actively chosen or earnestly posited. Thus before »the spirit becomes actual« and there is explicit choice in the will, the person is, as VH says, »not animal, but neither is he really man« (CA 49; SV1 4, 319). Hence the concomitant *anxiety* in innocence, which is »the profound secret of innocence« (CA 41; SV1 4, 313), is thus not yet a sign of moral ‘guilt’ (CA 42; SV1 4, 314), but can be understood as the experience of a special kind of *ambiguity* in the agent’s highest-order will. This ambiguity is not a conflict of authentically undertaken cares or commitments; it is rather a sense of the will as an *unsaturated potential*, open to an indefinite range of unspecified possibilities. The anxiety of innocence lacks a clear object precisely because it is the experience of a freedom or modal openness that is unsaturated in just this sense: Adam’s anxiety is »a nothing – the anxious possibility of *being able*. He has no conception of what he is able to do« (CA 44; SV1 4, 315) which is precisely why it does not appear to him as »an ability to choose the good or the evil« (CA 49; SV1 4, 320).⁴⁹

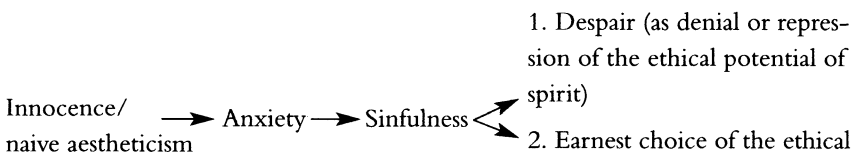
The ability actively to determine one’s highest-order volition or ownmost commitment must become explicit to the agent before its significance can be personally experienced in terms of the ethical distinction. Thus, as I read it, for Kierkegaard the sense in which Adam has no ‘knowledge’ of good or evil (CA 44; SV1 4, 315) is not so much a *cognitive* deficiency in understanding objective authority but more a volitional

lack of the *appropriation* needed to connect the authority of ethical categories to his freedom, giving it subjective meaning or personal relevance *for him*. Likewise, the aesthete has a speculative outline-knowledge of good and evil, but he does not in the biblical sense (of intimate familiarity) *know* these categories. This is evidently the sense VH has in mind when he writes, »This applies above all to the difference between good and evil, which indeed can be expressed in language but nevertheless is only for freedom (...)« (CA 45-46; SV1 4, 316). Only through free appropriation can the ethical distinction which is already cognitively anticipated be fully comprehended. Thus VH says that human innocence, unlike animal ignorance of morals, is already »qualified in the direction of knowledge« (CA 68; SV1 4, 338). Our *telos* involves making the substantive contrast between good and evil our own in the most intimate way, as the foundation of our own self-constituting choices.

In *Either/Or II*, something external must help bring the aesthete to the point of facing the choice between the aesthetic and ethical in his highest-order will. Likewise, in the *Concept of Anxiety*, VH follows Usteri's interpretation that the prohibition on eating the fruit itself brings Adam to the point where sin is possible, or »predisposes that which breaks forth in Adam's qualitative leap« (CA 39; SV1 4, 311). But since it is impossible to explain psychologically why a prohibition should awaken 'concupiscentia,' or sinfulness as inordinate desire for the forbidden (CA 40; SV1 4, 312), VH says instead that, »the prohibition induces in him anxiety, for the prohibition awakens in him freedom's possibility« (CA 44; SV1 4, 315). The prohibition's function relative to freedom here is like the function of the *Anstoß* – the 'check' of alterity – in consolidating self-consciousness in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*.⁵⁰ As VH notes, Franz Baader says that the prohibition is a 'temptation,' not in the sense of a temptation to evil, but rather in the sense of a stimulus that elicits and consolidates freedom, or serves as »freedom's 'necessary other'« (CA 39f.; SV1 4, 311).⁵¹ In *Either-Or* and the *Postscript*, the aesthete encounters such an 'other' or *Anstoß* in suffering or misfortune,⁵² which is an obstacle to continued aestheticism, an intrusion that quickens her awareness of the possibility of choosing between aesthetic and ethical determinations of the highest-order will. Likewise in the Fall, for the innocent person the prohibition and threat of punishment are *Anstoße* that awaken »The infinite possibility of being able« and bring innocence »to its uttermost« (CA 45; SV1 4, 316), to the limit of the naive-aesthetical, where through a leap it will become spiritual, either in sinfulness or its opposite.

In other words, the anxiety Kierkegaard is concerned with is specifically *volitional anxiety*: in this state, the will or spirit manifests its own anticipatory and pre-reflective sense that it will be faced with what William James would have called a *forced choice*. But anxiety in this sense is not necessarily the defense mechanism of an unwilling chooser. Even an individual who does not shrink back, but opens herself to the new horizons of possibility emerging before her must undergo anxiety as an unavoidable growing pain of the spirit. To progress towards full selfhood, the individual must cultivate her agency by identifying with her anxiety, finding in it a kind of intellectual intuition of her individuality as a being of volitional freedom in temporal form.

One cannot understand *Either/Or II* or *The Concept of Anxiety*, then, without grasping the close relation between the categories of aestheticism and innocence. It is in principle possible to move from aesthetic to ethical existence without sin, but in fact the ethical categories always first come alive to us through guilty choices mediated by anxiety. No human being develops directly from innocence into a self, defined by its proper relation to the infinite source of value; it is always in sin that human beings discover that our life cannot have the sort of meaning we require without reference to an eternal goal. As Alastair Hannay puts it, for Kierkegaard the »threshold insight« into the nature of good and evil that comes from discovering »the inability of temporal categories to provide criteria of personal identity and humanly fulfilling achievement« always takes the »natural initial form« of sinfulness.⁵³ This insight corresponds in my former analysis of *Either/Or* to the agent's awakening to the primordial responsibility to choose the ethical as a responsibility he has already shirked. And Hannay also regards the action of »choosing the ethical« as the positive response to the »initially natural negative development« of sin, the response which (if sustained) leads to overcoming despair.⁵⁴ Thus in Kierkegaard's sequence, sinfulness can lead to two main possible resolutions:



The notion of volitional identification is also implicit in this account of anxiety. On the one hand, the anxiety which forces the will towards ex-

PLICIT choice and a full or ‘subjective’ knowledge of good and evil is an *Anstoß*, external to the will, yet the person becomes ‘guilty’ (capable of ethical qualification) through partially or ambiguously identifying with his potential for freedom:

(...) he who becomes guilty through anxiety is indeed innocent, for it was not he himself but anxiety, a foreign power, that laid hold of him, a power that he did not love but about which he was anxious. And yet he is guilty, for he sank in anxiety, which he nevertheless loved even as he feared it (CA 43; SV1 4, 314).

In other words, Adam’s predisposition comes from identifying with his anxiety, or with the potential freedom it signifies; it is his own spirit, in its dreaming state, that is the ‘hostile power’ (CA 43; SV1 4, 315). Thus VH makes the Jamesian argument that »each person is tempted by himself« (CA 48; SV1 4, 319) – which also alludes to Fichte’s idea that there is a sense in which each person’s freedom is its own *Anstoß*. Similarly, as we saw, in his highest or innermost will the aesthete tacitly works at remaining naive or ‘innocent’ of the ethical, and resists letting the choice of highest-order volition become an explicit problem for him. The aesthete tacitly identifies with the anxious ambiguity of his innocence, but his consequent anxiety about this very identification inevitably brings the problem to a head (though without determining it). So when he finally faces his freedom to choose his highest-order will, he is *eo ipso* already ‘guilty’ for having postponed it – and thus he experiences subjectively the responsibility to ‘choose the ethical’ mode of existence, i.e. to take active responsibility for his character or spiritual self by forming commitments of the higher-order will grounded in objective duties and values.

Just as in *Either/Or*, however, this highest freedom, which leaps either into sin or earnestness, is not »an abstract *liberum arbitrium*« (CA 49; SV1 4, 320). By ‘abstract,’ VH means *indifference* or a perfect equilibrium between alternatives, which is conceivable only in an imaginary disinterestedness. As Thomte notes, Kierkegaard follows Leibniz in this respect, rejecting any »ability of the will to choose *independently* of antecedent factors« (CA, 236, note 58). Instead, as Tanner nicely expresses it, »Kierkegaard’s treatise tries to chart an elusive *via media* between rigid necessity on the one hand and random spontaneity on the other.«⁵⁵

This *intermediate* notion of liberty works roughly as represented in the following spatial model: think of the possibilities of action physically

open to an agent at any time as forming an asymmetrical field anchored to her character in the center: those options closer to her are more easily choosable, and those farther away are more difficult to choose, given her acquired character. But every choice alters (or deepens) the center of gravity in the character at the hub, and thus shifts the whole field. Freedom for Kierkegaard is always factually conditioned by the already-acquired character of the choosing spirit, and so it is never *neutral* between its possibilities, since these are synthetic (i.e. *volitional*) ‘possibilities’ rather than merely logical possibilities for the spirit. At the same time, what makes the spirit free is not its having this or that concrete option but its unsaturated ability, its ‘infinity’ by which it transcends the factual and it not *determined* by the antecedents which nevertheless affect or condition it: thus »sin cannot be explained by anything antecedent to it, any more than can freedom« (CA 112; SV1 4, 380). Between this free transcendence and the actual choice it finally posits lies *anxiety*, which is precisely our experience of the *confluence* of factually conditioning dispositions and the openness of unsaturated possibility:

In a logical system, it is convenient to say that possibility passes over into actuality. However, in actuality it is not so convenient, and an intermediate term is required. The intermediate term is anxiety (...) Anxiety is neither a category of necessity nor a category of freedom [i.e. infinite ability]; it is entangled freedom, where freedom is not free in itself but entangled, not by necessity, but in itself (CA 49; SV1 4, 320).

This enigmatic image of freedom ‘entangled in itself’ is the core of Kierkegaard’s existential psychology. In one sense, as Marino has emphasized, ‘entangled freedom’ is a pejorative: it refers to freedom in a »less than perfect form,«⁵⁶ enmeshed in weakness, irresolve, dizzy uncertainty, and self-doubt. But our freedom is also self-entangled in another *constitutive* sense (which alone makes avoidable enmeshment in the pejorative sense possible): it expresses the idea that the ‘spirit’ on which selfhood depends is a freedom always conditioned by *its own* qualitative modality or form of ‘possibility’. Free will’s inward limits do not derive from external constraints or causal necessities, but from ‘dispositions’ of the higher-order will itself that shape our volitional possibilities and qualify their relative availabilities for choice. This freedom is »entangled in itself« because the very dispositions of identification which shape and direct its volitional possibilities are the result of its own transcending leaps: that which con-

ditions freedom also presupposes it. Yet – and this is the key – no matter how far we regress, even to the most inward choice between the aesthetic and the ethical, *neither* is the will ever motivated or explained by a character that is just predetermined or given as an ‘individual essence,’ *nor* does it ever begin shaping its inward character in total arbitrariness without any vestige of ‘self’ already there to condition it. In other words, spirit or free will is self-entangled in this constitutive sense *all the way down*. At the bottom, as Beabout puts it, a child’s freedom is conditioned by the social environment in which she is raised, and this is precisely how hereditary sin operates. But »the environment never wholly determines the individual,« and different responses to the environment remain possible.⁵⁷ But either way she goes, the agent’s responses are themselves conditioned by anxiety of historically situated finite freedom, and thus never begin in a motivational vacuum.

As a result, the person’s ultimate character is neither simply unchosen or teleologically determined, as in MacIntyre’s ‘narrative essentialism,’⁵⁸ nor is it the ‘original project’ of Sartre’s absolute freedom, which remains in anguish because of its uncontrollable future mutability. Our lasting volitional identifications *do* affect what is possible for us, and thus allow us to exercise a substantial level of control over our future actions and commitment, making for narrative unity. But this spiritual character begins in and retains a freedom that is always capable of changing our highest identifications, despite the difficulty of the choices this involves.

Something like this idea of dispositions of the higher-order will that form *inner conditions* on volitional possibility is apparent in VH’s discussion of inwardness and disposition later in the *Concept of Anxiety* (pp. 146–150; *SVI* 4, 412–416). This section makes clear that earnestness is a kind of free ‘disposition’ of the *higher-order* will: VH says that earnestness is »a higher as well as a deeper expression for what disposition is« (*CA* 148; *SVI* 4, 414). While disposition »is a determinant of immediacy,« and the repetition it involves is thus ‘habit’ (or disposition of first-order will), earnestness is a different *kind* of disposition in which repetition involves »originality preserved in the responsibility of freedom.« As a result, »earnestness can never become a habit« (*CA* 149; *SVI* 4, 414). 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.⁵⁹

IV. Conclusion

It is clear that the notion of intermediate liberty developed in the *Concept of Anxiety* confirms my explanation of why the 'choice' between the aesthetic and ethical in *Either/Or II* is not an arbitrary or irrational choice. The complex dialectic of free choice and ethical authority in the Judge's 'Equilibrium' letter carefully anticipates Haufniensis's description of innocence, good and evil, and anxiety and freedom in the narrative of the Fall. The Judge describes authenticity as choice with »real earnestness,« (*EO* 162; *SV1*, 2,144) and writes that

The personality is already interested in the choice before one chooses, and when the choice is postponed, the personality chooses unconsciously, or the choice is made by obscure powers within it (...) (*EO*, 168; *SV1*, 2,149).

The problem of the Fall and original sin should therefore be seen as underlying the account in *Either/Or II*, and the distinction between the aesthetic and ethical should be understood in that light. Every human being repeats the original sin, but *in the same process* they also repeat the original discovery of freedom that leads to selfhood. In freedom, we discover the possibility of a self-relation that depends in turn on the Eternal, first as ethical ideality and then as a personal Absolute. Our human relationship to God thus has the possibility of sin (and the potential to become aware of this possibility) written into it from the start, and we could not be what we are without this. This is not simply a Schellingian heresy, however. It is also arguably St. Augustine's conclusion in Part III of *On Free Choice of the Will*. To place Kierkegaard in this tradition requires more argument than I have given here, but I hope to have laid a basis for such an argument.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the International Kierkegaard Conference at St. Olaf College, June 7-11, 1997. I wish to express thanks to my commentator, Karen Hoffmann. This essay has also benefitted from Gordon Marino's paper on anxiety, published after the conference.
2. M.G. Piety, »Kierkegaard on Rationality,« *Faith and Philosophy* 10.3. Society of Christian Philosophers, 1996, pp. 366-367.
3. A. Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, esp. ch. 3.
4. G. Stack, *Kierkegaard's Existential Ethics*, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1977, esp. ch. 3.
5. A. Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, New York, Routledge Press, 1982, esp. ch. 3.
6. T.P. Jackson, »Kierkegaard's Metatheology,« *Faith and Philosophy* 4.1 Society of Christian Philosophers, 1987, pp.71-85.
7. J.J. Davenport, »The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical: A Response to MacIntyre,« *Southwest Philosophy Review*, Southwestern Philosophical Society, 1995, pp. 73-108.
8. Cf. H. Frankfurt, »The Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,« *Journal of Philosophy* 68.1, 1971, reprinted in H. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 11-25.
9. Frankfurt, »The Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,« pp. 78-85.
10. Such as by a critical interlocutor like Judge William, for example.
11. Cf. Davenport, »The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical,« esp. p. 91.
12. These themes are pursued further in my paper »Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics,« forthcoming in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, ed. Davenport & Rudd [mss under review].
13. The references correspond to the following editions of Kierkegaard's works: CA, Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. R. Thomte & A.B. Anderson, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1980. CUP, Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans H. & E. Hong, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1992. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans., W. Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1944. SV1, Kierkegaard's *Samlede Værker*, ed. A.B. Drachmann, J.L. Heiberg, & H.O. Lange, vol. I-XIV, Copenhagen, Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag, 1901-1906.
14. In this respect, it is interesting that VH says that he is »devout in my belief in authority« but makes fun of blind obedience to *human* authority (CA 8; SV1 4, 280). Moreover, the new position on original sin which VH stakes out is undoubtedly close in form, although not in specific content, to Kant's notion of the original predisposition to evil that corrupts *each human person in turn*, as laid out in his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Cf. Philip Quinn's comparison of Kant and Kierkegaard on original sin in Quinn, »Original Sin, Radical Evil, and Moral Identity,« *Faith and Philosophy* 1.2. (A 10.3. Society of Christian Philosophers 1984, pp. 188-202, and Vanessa Rumble's comparison of Kant and Haufniensis in V. Rumble, »The Oracle's Ambiguity: Freedom and Original Sin in Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety*,« *Soundings* 75.4, 1992, pp. 605-625, see p. 608.
15. Later I will discuss a differing view put forward by Rumble in »The Oracle's Ambiguity: Freedom and Original Sin in Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety*,« But, in initial support of my reading, note that the ethical significance of the reinterpretation of

- original sin fits with »Haufnien's denunciation of spiritlessness« in Danish Christendom later in the text, which Rumble herself regards as *Kierkegaard's* (not the pseudonym's) motive for 'the work as a whole,' p. 617.
16. As Thomte explains it, »Sin' signifies actual sin; 'sinfulness' expresses the greater possibility for new and actual sins, a possibility that never constitutes the actuality of sin« (CA 232, note 20). Note that *logical* possibilities can never be quantitative in Kierkegaard's sense, i.e. more or less logically possible. The modal sense at stake here is thus a synthetic rather than logical one: it is *volitional* possibility. In this synthetic sense, sinfulness is a state in which sin is both volitionally possible and more probable than without this state. Hence VH's description of sinfulness as a 'real' possibility (see the next inset quote).
 17. So the free qualitative leaps it involves – the origin of sin – cannot be explained psychologically. Reductive psychological interpretations of sin – for example, »as a disease, an abnormality, a poison, or a disharmony« are *aesthetic*, and the tendency to think of sin this way »occurs more or less in every human life before the ethical manifests itself« (CA 15; SV1 4, 287).
 18. Thus »The second [i.e. religious] ethics has the actuality of sin within its scope, and here psychology can intrude only through a misunderstanding« (CA 23; SV1 4, 295). A deeper metaphysical idea underlies this point, as another passage makes clear: »freedom is never possible; as soon as it is, it is actual« (CA 22; SV1 4, 294). On this Kantian view, freedom can be grasped only from an *essentially practical* 'standpoint' [Kant's term] or 'point of view' (Kierkegaard's term): from the theoretical standpoint, we grasp only its possibility, which is precisely not to grasp it *qua freedom*. Since sin is a free act, its modes of possibility may be apprehended in psychological theory, but a psychological theory of actual sin cannot grasp it *qua sin*. This conception of freedom as something 'other' than theoretical modes of possibility – i.e. as something else than the correlate of logical necessity, causal necessity, etc. – has recently been rigorously developed by Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald, Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 1993.
 19. There are hints of the decisive influence of this agape-ethics later in the text: for instance, in Chapter II, VH argues that is »cowardly sympathy« to thank God »for not being like« a person suffering from guilt: »sympathy is true only when one admits rightly and profoundly to oneself that what has happened to one human being can happen to all« (CA 54; SV1 4, 325).
 20. See G. Marino, »Anxiety in *The Concept of Anxiety*,« *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed., Hannay & Marino, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 308–328, p. 315. However, Marino also says that the text contains »very little in the way of positive arguments.« On the contrary, I am trying to show that there are arguments to reconstruct here.
 21. » (...) this is what is essential to human existence: that man is *individuum* and as such simultaneously himself and the whole race, and in such a way that the whole race participates in the individual and the individual in the whole race« (CA 28; SV1 4, 300).
 22. In a note, VH adds: »As the history of the race moves on, the individual continually begins anew« (CA 33; SV1 4, 305).
 23. »Hence the individual has a history. But if the individual has a history, then the race also has a history« (CA 29; SV1 4, 301).
 24. »the history of the race is not that of the individual and more than the history of the individual is that of the race« (CA 31; SV1 4, 303).

25. This implication is especially apparent in one of VH's defenses against being labeled Pelegian: »The race has its history, within which sinfulness continues to have its quantitative determinability (...) It is no doubt true that this sinfulness, which is the progression of the race, may express itself as a greater or lesser disposition in the particular individual *who by his act assumes it*, but this is a more or less quantitative determination, which does not constitute the concept of guilt« (CA 37-38; SV1 4, 309, my italics).
26. Such as the command to love or care about every other individual, and the command to love oneself.
27. That this ethics *has* a ground in the nature of persons further suggests that it is not (merely or purely) a 'divine command' ethics, but that is an argument for another paper.
28. See the remarks on p.34: »A species of animals, although it has preserved itself through thousands of generations, never brings forth an individual.«
29. »If any other individual in the race can by its history have significance in the history of the race, then Adam has it also. If Adam has it only by virtue of that first sin, the concept of history is canceled, i.e. history has come to an end in the very moment it began« (CA 33; SV1 4, 305).
30. For example, VH writes, with particular reference to Eve, that »It is the fact of being derived that predisposes the individual, yet without making him guilty« (CA 47; SV1 4, 318), which might sound like *innate* sinfulness in human finitude. But in fact it is historical, not innate: VH takes this as explaining an essential aspect of the 'quantitation' or external difference that historical progression makes in the predisposing possibility of sin: »the view presented in this work does not deny the propagation of sinfulness through generation (...). Yet it is said only that sinfulness moves through quantitative categories, whereas sin enters by the qualitative leap« (CA 47; SV1 4, 318). The key quantitative category through which sinfulness develops historically is gender-recognition and sexuality: »So sinfulness is by no means sensuousness, but without sin there is no sexuality, and without sexuality, no history« (CA 49; SV1 4, 319).
31. L. Dupré, »Of Time and Eternity in Kierkegaard's 'Concept of Anxiety,« *Faith and Philosophy* 1.2. Society of Christian Philosophers, 1984, pp. 160-175, p. 161.
32. Dupré, »Of Time and Eternity in Kierkegaard's 'Concept of Anxiety,« p. 166.
33. J.S. Tanner, *Anxiety in Eden: A Kierkegaardian Reading of 'Paradise Lost,'* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 31.
34. Rumble, »The Oracle's Ambiguity,« p. 606.
35. Rumble, »The Oracle's Ambiguity,« p. 608, referring to CA, p. 73.
36. Rumble, »The Oracle's Ambiguity,« p. 619.
37. As VH says, in the worst case, »the individual confounds himself with his historical knowledge of sinfulness« (CA 75; SV1 4, 344), or sees himself as already participating in it.
38. On this point, also see the remark from JP I 91 (*Pap. II A 18*) *n.d.* 1837 (sec. xii. 28): »Therefore one ought to be very careful with children, never to believe the worst and by untimely suspicion (...) occasion an anxious consciousness in which innocent but fragile souls can easily be tempted to believe themselves guilty, to despair, and thereby to make the first step towards the goal foreshadowed by the unsettling presentiment (...).« Doubtless Kierkegaard has in mind the anxiety produced in him by his own father's sense of being cursed for his sin.
39. Thus VH qualifies: »Even when I say that for an individual sensuousness is posited as sinfulness before the leap, it remains true that it is not essentially posited as such, for

- the individual does not posit it or understand it» (CA 77; SV1 4, 345–346). To be ‘essentially’ posited requires freedom.
40. On this point, cfr. G. Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses: Kierkegaard on Anxiety and Despair*, Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1996, p. 57.
 41. Marino, »Anxiety in *The Concept of Anxiety*,« p. 320.
 42. I also think it is possible to resist Rumble’s reading of the pseudonym’s function in *The Concept of Anxiety* – though she develops many interesting points in its favor. It is possible instead to read Haufniensis as Kierkegaard’s example of how an inquiry of the psychological kind – which would otherwise be distortive and existentially dangerous – *can be legitimately done* when explicit attention is constantly paid to keeping within its parameters of competence, as Haufniensis does by constantly reminding the reader that his analysis of the antecedents can *never* deny the additional necessity of the leap to reach sinful acts themselves: »it should be remembered that, as always, I only speak psychologically and never annul the qualitative leap« (CA 74; SV1 4, 343). Note also that Gregory Beabout – one of the few commentators who takes the pseudonymity of the book seriously – argues that »though Vigilius the watchman may be an observer, he is not a detached observer,« but an earnest Christian observer (even though his earnestness is not explicitly upbuilding): see Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, p. 27.
 43. »Consequently, anxiety means two things: the anxiety in which the individual posits sin by the qualitative leap« [the preceding anxiety] »and the anxiety that entered in and enters in with sin« [anxiety as a consequence] (CA 54; SV1 4, 325).
 44. From the draft of *Concept of Anxiety* (CA 184; Pap. V B 53:4 n.d. 1844). In other words, the leap of first sin both actualizes the possibility of sinfulness (as if it were already inscribed in our existence) and yet ‘posits the quality’ of sinfulness, shaping the very predisposition it presupposes. This is related to the paradox in Kant’s account of radical evil that the originary disposition to sin must itself somehow be *freely incorporated*.
 45. The term is Hannay’s: cfr. Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, p. 177.
 46. Tanner, *Anxiety in Eden*, p. 73.
 47. See Davenport, »The Meaning of Kierkegaard’s Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical,« pp. 91f.
 48. It is interesting in this regard that Harry Frankfurt first developed his account of personhood in terms of the hierarchical structure of the will in response to an account by Strawson that portrayed personhood simply as a synthesis of the psychical and the physical, without more. Frankfurt’s introduction of higher-order volition as the missing element in this synthesis nicely parallels Kierkegaard’s introduction of ‘spirit’ as something above the psychosomatic unity of the human animal.
 49. Dupré has suggested that this is meant to signify the *arbitrariness* of the romantic freedom Kierkegaard rejects: »Without an awareness of its restricting finitude, that is, its necessity the sense of freedom turns into an empty *feeling* of possibility. Like the Stoic consciousness in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*, it asserts the infinite potential only by means of a steadfast refusal of any concrete content,« p. 166. But the sense of freedom in anxiety is not indifferent or neutral *liberum arbitrium*, so this comparison is not correct.
 50. In this regard, cf. D. Breazeale, »Check or Checkmate: On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self,« *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks & Dieter Sturma, Albany, SUNY Press, pp. 87–114.
 51. This idea is clearly related to the Fichtean concept of an *Anstoß*: as Thomte explains, »Franz Baader’s doctrine of the will and freedom rests on the assumption that the will

can become conscious of its freedom and determination only through a choice necessitated by external incitements of various kinds» (*CA*, 234, note 38). In other words, these excitements or *Anstöße* bring the primordial decision to a *forced choice*, as with the aesthete in my earlier analysis of *Either/Or II*.

52. This is the core of Piety's argument.
53. Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, p. 164. He adds: »natural in view of the human predisposition to remain anchored in the psychosomatic.« But while this gloss fits some passages in the texts, it seems to throw us back onto the Schellingian account of sinfulness as resulting from the chthonic in human nature.
54. Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, p. 164.
55. Tanner, *Anxiety in Eden*, p. 29.
56. Marino, »Anxiety in *The Concept of Anxiety*,« p. 318.
57. Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, p. 58.
58. See A. MacIntyr, *After Virtue*, Second Ed., Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, chapter 15, on »The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of Tradition,« where he writes: »The self inhabits a character whose unity is given as the [narrative] unity of character« (p. 217). I use the phrase 'narrative essentialism' for a group of modern theories of the person that recasts the Boethian notion of an 'individual essence' in narrative and interpersonal/hermeneutic terms. Scheler's conception of each person's individuality as resting in the uniqueness of the personal 'style' that he exemplifies in his actions and which is grounded in his ultimate character is another example of what I mean by narrative essentialism.
59. Cfr. Frankfurt, »The Importance of What We Care About,« pp. 80-94. I have discussed this comparison more fully in »Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics,« forthcoming in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*.