

KIERKEGAARD ON RATIONALITY

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This paper is concerned with Kierkegaard's views on the nature of human rationality in the specific context of the relation between competing interpretations of existence. Contemporary dialogue has reached the point where it appears movement between such interpretations can only be understood as rational, if it is seen as a natural or evolutionary development and not as the result of a choice. This paper provides a sketch of a theory of rationality which enables us to make sense of the impression that we do, at least occasionally, *choose* between competing interpretations of existence and that we make such choices for what we believe are good, or even compelling *reasons*.

The idea has been advanced that human behavior, or more specifically, choice, can only be understood as rational within a particular conceptual framework. Proponents of this view contend that any possible system of justification must be understood as relative to a particular framework or system of values and hence that it is not possible to make rational choices *between* frameworks. Charles Taylor argues, on the other hand, that movement between frameworks can be rational. He bases this argument, however, on the claim that such movement is a natural or evolutionary development and not the result of a *choice*.¹ The contemporary debate on this issue has reached the point where it appears we must consider *either* that it is not possible to choose rationally between frameworks, *or* that there is rational movement between frameworks, but that this movement is not the result of a choice.

Taylor contends that the transition from one framework to another is effected through what he refers to as "error reducing moves."² That is, he asserts that insofar as a given framework may involve certain incoherences, and insofar as an individual may be motivated to reduce these incoherences, his effort to do this may actually eventuate in the production of, or transition to, a *new* framework. He asserts that the situation of Luther with respect to traditional catholicism could be understood as exemplifying a movement of this sort.

Taylor argues, however, that such a transition from one framework to another is not the result of an appeal to some criterion that is *independent* of the two frameworks in question, but rather that it is the natural result of the desire of the individual for a more coherent scheme for interpreting his



existence. Taylor does not see the individual as *choosing* between competing systems of interpretation, but rather as developing new systems through an effort to reduce the incoherences or errors inherent in the old systems.

Thus, while many theorists are disposed to see the movement from one framework to another as fundamentally irrational, Taylor sees it as rational. Taylor is in agreement with the former group, however, in that he is not willing to allow that there are any criteria independent of the two frameworks in question, such that an appeal to these criteria would justify, or show to be rational, the *choice* of one over another.

It would appear that the *impasse* at which the contemporary debate on the nature of human rationality has arrived is the result of the tendency of philosophers, despite their efforts to the contrary, to cling to the old Enlightenment view of disinterested and dispassionate reasoning as the paradigm of that rationality. I shall argue that Kierkegaard provides us with a picture of an *interested* and *impassioned* reason which enables us to see how it is possible for the transition from one framework to another to be *both* rational *and* the result of a choice and that insofar as it does this, it represents a more "reasonable" picture of reason than the one that has been traditionally offered by metaphysics.

I

The view that choice can only be understood as rational relative to a particular conceptual framework is precisely the one that provides the foundation for Alasdair MacIntyre's charge in *After Virtue*³ that Kierkegaard considers moral commitment to be "the expression of a criterionless choice,"⁴ or a choice between "incompatible and incommensurable moral premises, a choice for which no rational justification can be given." MacIntyre refers to this position as Kierkegaard's "discovery" and identifies it as his primary contribution to the history of moral or ethical philosophy; a contribution which MacIntyre claims marks the beginning of the "distinctively modern standpoint" on the nature of moral debate. MacIntyre is undoubtedly correct in his identification of the distinctively modern standpoint on such debates. He is not correct, however, as will become clear in the pages which follow, in his ascription of this view to Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard's frameworks may be designated 'aesthetic,' 'ethical,' 'religious' and 'paradoxically religious' or 'Christian.'⁵ That is, Kierkegaard's individual views existence from within one or the other of these alternative schemes of interpretation. The aesthetic individual, for example, views existence as defined aesthetically. He interprets the value of the phenomena of his existence—including his own actions—as derivative of, or reducible to, their aesthetic significance. Thus an aesthete values actions not insofar as they exemplify morally uplifting principles, but rather insofar as they are immediately compelling, interesting, or sensuously gratifying.

The difficulty, as MacIntyre so forcefully pointed out, is that different frameworks represent significantly different systems of values, hence what may serve as a criterion for choice within an ethical framework will very likely not enjoy the same status within an aesthetic framework.⁶ The moral superiority of an ethical over an aesthetic interpretation of existence cannot serve, for an aesthete, as a criterion for choosing it over his present interpretation, because such "superiority" is not considered by an aesthete to be of any positive value. This situation is, of course, mirrored by that of the ethicist; hence one might conclude from this, as indeed MacIntyre does conclude, that such a choice between frameworks as Kierkegaard has B recommending to A in *Either-Or*, cannot be a rational one.

MacIntyre focuses upon the transition from an aesthetic to an ethical view of existence. It is clear, however, from Kierkegaard's own description of this transition, that MacIntyre has not properly understood Kierkegaard's position. The aesthetic stage of existence is also referred to by Kierkegaard as the stage of immediacy. To be an aesthete, for Kierkegaard, means to have an understanding of existence which interprets it in terms of what appears, in an immediate sense, to be true about it. Such an individual has his consciousness, according to Kierkegaard—and in particular his consciousness of suffering—in the dialectic of fortune and misfortune.⁷ Thus Kierkegaard argues that misfortune or suffering is, for this individual,

like a narrow pass on the way; now the immediate individual is in it, but his view of life must essentially always tell him that the difficulty will soon cease to hinder because it is a foreign element. If it does not cease, he despairs, by which his immediacy ceases to function, and the transition to another understanding of existence is rendered possible.⁸

What happens to the aesthete is that, in his despair, it seems to him as if there is a discrepancy between his suffering—insofar as it is persistent—and the interpretation of existence in which suffering is viewed as having merely accidental significance. Thus the aesthete, using the persistence of his suffering as a criterion for choosing between a view of existence in which suffering is considered merely accidental and a view in which it is seen as essential, may reject the aesthetic interpretation in favor of an ethical one. Such an individual adopts an ethical framework, not because it promises to *alleviate* his suffering, but because it provides an interpretation of his existence which sees suffering as something essential to that existence, and thus provides a more adequate—or one might even say more rational—account of his subjective experience.

It may be that there are other criteria, or other aspects of subjective experience apart from suffering, that could serve as criteria for choosing between competing interpretations of existence on Kierkegaard's view. Suffering is, however, the criterion which Kierkegaard himself chooses to focus upon

when examining the nature of the transition from one stage of existence to another in the *Postscript*⁹ and it will become apparent, in the pages which follow, that this criterion alone is enough to expose the erroneous nature of MacIntyre's interpretation of Kierkegaard and his subsequent charge that Kierkegaard was an irrationalist.

II

Insofar as one framework or interpretation of existence may be spoken of as more adequate than another—that is, insofar as it may be spoken of as providing a more satisfactory account of the nature of the subjective experience of a particular individual—it is entirely reasonable to consider that it is more rational.¹⁰ What is likely less clear, however, is precisely *how* the individual comes to consider that one interpretation is more adequate than another. In this instance we are concerned specifically with how it is that the individual comes to consider that the persistence of suffering is too great for the aesthetic interpretation of existence to be plausible, for it appears that it would be entirely possible for an individual to persist in suffering while *simultaneously* persisting in the belief that the suffering was indeed accidental and that in the next moment, with a change of fortune, it would stop.

Objectively, there is no incoherence in the idea that an aesthetic individual may experience persistent suffering. The accidental may indeed be persistent. The aesthetic interpretation of existence is not contradicted by the occurrence of what is, within this framework, the improbable persistence of suffering. Such statements of probability or improbability as a given framework expresses

cannot be strictly contradicted by any event [e.g., the persistence of suffering] however improbably this event may appear in its light. The contradiction must be established by a *personal* [my italics] act of appraisal.¹¹

The question is: Whence arises this "personal act of appraisal"; or when and how does the individual come to consider the persistence of his suffering to be too great and hence too improbable, within the aesthetic framework, for that interpretation of existence to be correct?

It is at this point that Kierkegaard's views concerning the role of passion in human reason come into play. It is widely recognized by Kierkegaard scholars that, as Heinrich Schmidinger expresses it: "*Subjektives Engagement ist...immer mit Leidenschaft und Pathos verbunden.*"¹² It has also been observed, however, that Kierkegaard considers passion to be opposed to reflection,¹³ hence it is often believed that subjective engagement, according to Kierkegaard, is purely emotional, or devoid of any intellectual component.

This view is the result of a failure to appreciate that the intellectual dimension of human experience is not reducible, for Kierkegaard, to reflection. Reflection is indeed dispassionate or disinterested, according to Kierkegaard.¹⁴

He also speaks of "abstract" or "systematic" thought as disinterested.¹⁵ This would appear, however, to be a rather abbreviated or short hand way of emphasizing that the object of such thought is not the self, for he states elsewhere that all knowledge "is interested,"¹⁶ whether the object of interest is something outside the knower, as is the case in metaphysics, or whether it is the knower himself, as is the case in ethics and religion.

Kierkegaard often equates passion and interest.¹⁷ It is thus reasonable to assume that, if knowledge is interested, then it is also passionate, or involves passion at some level. But if knowledge involves passion, then it would appear that passion is not essentially opposed to reason, but rather plays an important part in the activity of the knower as such. If this is the case, then the passionate nature of subjective engagement does not preclude the possibility that such engagement could be rational. Hence the "personal act of appraisal" in question is not a merely arbitrary, capricious or emotional reaction to a phenomenon or particular set of phenomena; it is the result of a rational assessment of this phenomenon, or these phenomena, where the reason in question is of a passionate or interested sort.

The difficulty is that very few scholars appreciate the way in which passion informs reason, on Kierkegaard's view. In order to throw some light on this issue I shall depart for a moment from the examination of Kierkegaard's texts and turn instead to the consideration of the views of a more contemporary philosopher on this same issue. Michael Polanyi, whose views on probability I quoted above, is concerned in his book *Personal Knowledge* with how it is that apparently objectively meaningless probability statements become subjectively meaningful guides for interpreting reality.¹⁸ Polanyi maintains that there is an area of extremely low probability—i.e., what we would refer to in everyday speech as an area of high improbability—that we find generally unacceptable. The occurrence of an event that is associated with this level of improbability leads us, he argues, to reject the interpretation of existence within which this event is considered so improbable and to search for a new interpretation where events such as the one in question are considered more probable. Polanyi goes on to point out, however, that any attempt to *formalize* the precise degree of improbability that we find unacceptable and which, when connected to a particular phenomenon within a given theory or interpretation of existence, would lead us to reject that view as false "is likely to go too far unless it acknowledges in advance *that it* [i.e., the formalization] *must remain within a framework of personal* [i.e., impassioned subjective] *judgement.*"¹⁹

The metaphysical tradition has led us to believe that such impassioned subjective judgement is vastly inferior—if indeed it has any claim to legitimacy at all—to dispassionate objective judgement. In a situation such as the one described above, however, a purely dispassionate or objective perspective

would lead to no judgement at all, but rather to a sort of skeptical *epoche*. That is, viewed purely objectively, the occurrence of a highly improbable event says nothing about the truth or falsity of the framework within which it is viewed as improbable; it neither supports it, nor discredits it, so it fails to provide us with a foundation—i.e., an *objective* foundation—for any judgement whatsoever concerning the status of the framework.

It is clear, though, that not only do we often make such judgements, we appear to be *compelled* to make them simply by virtue of the kind of creatures we are. The difficulty is that there appear to be no fixed guidelines in relation to these judgements. But to say that there are no *fixed* guidelines is not to say that there are no guidelines at all. Passion, which has traditionally been considered to be in essential opposition to reason, permeates our understanding—or attempts to understand—our situation at such points and it is this passion, according to Kierkegaard, which serves as a guide to the judgements we make in these situations.

III

The metaphysical tradition has been reluctant to appreciate the way in which passion informs our understanding of ourselves and the phenomena of our experience, hence it is to Polanyi, a chemist turned philosopher—i.e., a metaphysical interloper—that we must turn for the explicitly formulated observation that some of the most meaningful of our assertions in science are only possible as the result of a collaboration of reason and passion and that these assertions will thus always and necessarily “have a passionate quality attached to them.”²⁰

Passion is admittedly not an easy concept to elucidate. Some effort at elucidation is necessary, however, because it is precisely passion that, according to Kierkegaard, informs the understanding of an individual in such a way that extra-framework criteria, or reasons for choosing between competing interpretations of existence, may come to exist for him.

A *positive* account of the meaning of ‘passion’ is difficult, if not impossible, to provide. An impression of this meaning may be provided, however, if the expression is understood to be contrasted with such expressions as ‘dispassion’ or ‘disinterestedness.’ Polanyi claims that passion is to be found in our “personal *participation*”²¹ with the phenomenon whose probability is in question. Such participation might be understood to exemplify an essentially interested, as opposed to disinterested, relation to this phenomenon. It is just such an *interested* stance which Kierkegaard believes is *appropriate* with respect to the subjective phenomenon of suffering.²² That is, Kierkegaard maintains that we have an essential interest in determining or choosing the proper interpretation of existence. Our eternal blessedness, or eternal damnation is, according to Kierkegaard, ultimately dependent upon this choice.

But if we do not take such an interested stance in relation to the phenomena of our subjective experience, then it will never be possible for us to choose between various interpretations of existence²³—and, in particular, to choose the *correct* one—for the criteria for such choices can only exist for the *interested* observer. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard argues in the *Post-script* that Christianity has “nothing whatever to do with the systematic zeal of the personally *indifferent* [my italics] individual,” but assumes rather “an infinite personal passionate *interest* [my italics]” on the part of the individual as “*conditio sine qua non*.”²⁴

Thus it becomes clear that the discernment of a discrepancy between the aesthetic interpretation of existence, which sees suffering as accidental, and the persistence of the suffering which the individual experiences, is the result of an impassioned or subjective judgement on the part of that individual. The greater the degree of passion with which the consciousness of the individual is informed, the less high the degree of the improbability of the suffering need be, in order for the individual to seize upon that improbability as grounds for rejecting the interpretation of existence within which the particular account of suffering is contained.²⁵

Picture the aesthete who experiences persistent suffering, but does not despair—i.e., he does not judge that his subjective experience discredits the interpretation of existence which views it as improbable. What distinguishes such an individual from one who *does* despair? It would appear that the individual who does not despair, fails to do so because he considers the phenomena of his existence—or of his subjective experience—*objectively*, which is to say, *dispassionately*; while the individual who *does* despair, does so precisely because he considers these same phenomena *subjectively* or *passionately*.

It is one thing, however, to observe that a choice between competing interpretations of existence is only possible if one takes a passionate or interested stance relative to the phenomena of one's subjective experience, and another to argue that such a stance justifies rather than merely explains this choice. Passion, for Kierkegaard, is the very essence of human existence. It is well known that Kierkegaard proposes that subjectivity is truth,²⁶ but it is not so well known that he also proposes that subjectivity is passion.²⁷ To be dispassionate, or insufficiently passionate, for Kierkegaard, is to be indifferent to existence, and this, in turn, amounts to being insufficiently human. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard considers the choice of an ethical over an aesthetic interpretation of existence to be *justified*, rather than merely *explicable*. That is, a passionate perspective relative to the phenomena of one's subjective experience is the only sort of perspective that is in keeping, on Kierkegaard's view, with the essence of the individual. A dispassionate perspective would not cohere with that essence.

Thus passion emerges as the catalyst of the exchange of one perspective

of existence for another. That is, passion breaks down the apparent coherence or descriptive adequacy of a particular interpretation of existence. Unless the consciousness of the individual is informed with a sufficient degree of passion, the persistence of his or her suffering cannot serve as a criterion for rejecting the aesthetic in favor of the ethical interpretation of existence.

It is, of course, possible to be *too* passionate. If the consciousness of the individual is informed with too much passion, the resultant interpretation of existence may cross over into the pathological. Such a phenomenon is actually addressed by Kierkegaard and referred to by him in the *Postscript* as subjective madness (*subjektive Galskab*).²⁸ It is important to note, however, that it is not possible to formalize the precise degree of passion which is sufficient to break down the aesthetic interpretation of existence so that the choice of another interpretation becomes possible, and yet not so great as to qualify the individual as pathological. It is precisely this resistance of passion, or of an understanding which is informed with passion, to such formalization that serves as a stumbling block to metaphysics. But this is simply our situation as human beings and part of the task of philosophy is to help us to achieve a more profound understanding of that situation.

IV

I have restricted my explication of the nature of the transition from one stage of existence to another to the transition from the aesthetic to the ethical stage. I have done this because this was the transition that MacIntyre examined and which he used in an effort to support his charge that Kierkegaard was an irrationalist. It should be clear now that Kierkegaard's own interpretation of the nature of this transition will not support MacIntyre's charge. Opponents of the view I am propounding might argue, however, that while it appears possible to consider the choice between any of the non-Christian interpretations as rational, the same thing cannot be said concerning the choice to adopt a Christian framework. It is tempting to interpret Kierkegaard such that it appears the transition to the Christian stage of existence is the result of a choice for which there can be no criterion.

We can see, however, from the quotation below, that there is a criterion for choosing the Christian interpretation; this criterion is precisely the phenomenon of the consciousness of sin. That is, Kierkegaard contends that

Christianity is only related to the consciousness of sin. Any other attempt to become a Christian for any other reason is quite literally lunacy; and that is how it should be.²⁹

Just as the ethical interpretation of existence provided a more adequate account of human suffering to the aesthete whose consciousness was informed with a sufficient degree of passion, so does the Christian interpretation provide a more adequate account of the subjective experience of the

individual whose consciousness is informed with an even greater degree of passion.

Such passion arises, again, from an *interested* stance toward the question of which of the possible interpretations of existence is correct. The more extreme the interpretation presented to the individual, the more passionate—as opposed to dispassionate—must his or her self examination be. That is, when an individual is presented with an interpretation of existence such as that offered by Christianity, an interpretation which makes his or her *eternal blessedness* or *eternal damnation* dependent upon its acceptance, then the proper response is not a casual concern as to the truth of this interpretation, but rather a deep and impassioned introspection in which the individual repeatedly asks himself: “Could this be the real nature of my existence?” “Does this interpretation of my existence make the most sense—i.e., more sense than any other interpretation—of my subjective experience?”³⁰

V

With this we have a simple model of Kierkegaard’s theory concerning the nature of human rationality. We must distinguish, however, what is essential to Kierkegaard’s position as he understood it, and what is essential for the purposes of defending Kierkegaard against the charge of irrationalism as that charge was leveled against him by MacIntyre. It is important to appreciate that Kierkegaard’s own understanding of the position described above involved a foundation of religious belief which is separable from the position itself. Kierkegaard would no more consider the persistence of an individual who has the good luck not to suffer in an aesthetic interpretation to be justified than we would consider the racism of an ignorant person to be justified. That is, just as we would consider that an ignorant person *should* know better than to be racist, Kierkegaard would consider that a fortunate person *should* know better than to persist in an aesthetic interpretation of existence.

Existence, for Kierkegaard, is characterized by sin and part of the way in which sin manifests itself is in the inability of the individual to sustain emotional equilibrium in the face of misfortune or adversity. It is this inability which accounts for the suffering in question. The difficulty is that this inability itself stems from an excessive attachment to worldly pleasure or comfort.³¹ As long as the existence of an individual is characterized by such attachment, suffering is still present in it, *in potentia*. Hence, while suffering justifies the choice of an ethical over an aesthetic interpretation of existence, on Kierkegaard’s view, the absence of suffering does not have the same significance. The absence of suffering does not justify the endorsement of an aesthetic view of existence because suffering is always present in the existence of an individual *in potentia*, so to speak, in the form of sin. Any individual

who is sufficiently reflective to appreciate the tenuous nature of happiness on the aesthetic interpretation, would find his or her existence, no matter how "fortunate," characterized by an anxiety or fear of potential adversity which would itself constitute a kind of suffering. The only way to avoid such anxiety, on Kierkegaard's view, would be to avoid reflection.

We may argue that different levels of reflection are natural for different sorts of people and that it is even possible for certain individuals to live lives almost entirely devoid of reflection. Kierkegaard's religious convictions compel him to assume, however, that the activity of reflection is universally human and that whatever differences there may be in the degree of reflection which characterize various individuals, even the least reflective individual can only avoid recognizing the tenuous nature of happiness on the aesthetic view of existence by *willfully refusing* to reflect upon the significance of this view. And this willful refusal, on Kierkegaard's view, constitutes, in turn, a flight from the acknowledgement of oneself as sinful.

It is not necessary, however, that one share Kierkegaard's religious views in order to appreciate the force of his claim concerning the possibility of extra-framework criteria for choosing between competing interpretations of existence. If this were necessary, then the charge of irrationalism could still be leveled against him. That is, the support for his position would ultimately rest upon a foundation of dogma that could not itself be chosen for any reason, for it would only be relative to this foundation that reasons for such choices could exist.

One of the most important aspects of Kierkegaard's position is that experience is distinguished from the various interpretations which may be supplied to it. The medium of experience, according to Kierkegaard, is *actuality*, while the medium of such interpretations is *ideality*. That is, the interpretations represent clusters of concepts (hence the origin of the appellation "conceptual framework") and the medium of concepts is abstract, in contrast to the medium of experience, which is concrete.³²

We can keep the view that subjective experience, insofar as it is actual, may be distinguished from a particular conceptual framework or ideal interpretation that is supplied to it and the claim that this experience can provide criteria for choosing between such frameworks, without having to accept the view that experience, properly defined, will always incline one toward a *particular* interpretation of existence. This is what one might refer to as the theoretical skeleton of Kierkegaard's view of rationality as it appears when stripped of the religious assumptions which gave the view its more specific definition in Kierkegaard's works.³³

Taylor's contention that the transition from one interpretation of existence to another is effected through a move of error reduction is consistent with much of what Kierkegaard says concerning such transitions. On Kierkegaard's

view, one rejects the aesthetic framework in favor of an ethical one precisely because a passionate interpretation of the persistence of one's suffering leads one to consider that there is an error in the aesthetic framework—the "error" in question being the view that suffering is of merely accidental significance or the result of misfortune. The difference between Taylor and Kierkegaard is that on Kierkegaard's account, the errors are not inconsistencies *within* a particular framework—for as we have seen, the persistence of suffering is not, objectively, inconsistent with the interpretation of existence which views such persistence as improbable—but are errors relative to the individual's subjective or impassioned *experience*.

One could express Kierkegaard's views in secular terms by substituting for "guilt consciousness" or "[t]he anguished conscience" what Taylor has identified as a "need for meaning."³⁴ Taylor contends that individuals are faced today with the problem of attempting to imbue their existence with some significance that goes beyond the expression and fulfillment—or lack thereof—of their daily needs.

Thus if one is more comfortable with the expression 'need for meaning' than with Kierkegaard's overtly religious expression like 'guilt consciousness,' an individual could be understood as adopting a particular framework because he perceived that that framework promised to imbue his existence with the meaning of which he felt a lack. In this way an ethical interpretation of existence could be seen as supplying meaning to the suffering of an individual that the aesthetic interpretation was unable to supply.³⁵

Concluding Comments

It should now be clear that the charge of irrationalism leveled against Kierkegaard by MacIntyre is based upon a misunderstanding of the relation between the aesthetic and the ethical interpretations of existence on Kierkegaard's view. Not only is Kierkegaard's philosophy not irrationalist in the way in which MacIntyre and others have claimed, his conception of the nature of human rationality is one which can be of great help in relation to the contemporary debate on the nature of human rationality. The view that "rational" decisions need not always be the result of purely objective or dispassionate speculation and that hence emotional or non-rational phenomena may serve as criteria for such choices is clearly one which would be of use to contemporary theorists.

Kierkegaard's interpretation of human rationality provides us with a positive alternative to the traditional conception of reason as disinterested and dispassionate. But it is not *simply* an alternative to this more traditional conception. It is an alternative with an *advantage*. That is, it provides us with a way to get beyond the *impasse* at which the contemporary debate on this issue has arrived, by reminding us that there are some areas of inquiry where

"an objective indifference can...learn nothing at all,"³⁶ or as Nagel expressed it in *The View From Nowhere*, where "the truth is not to be found by traveling as far away from one's personal perspective as possible,"³⁷ and hence where being "rational" means taking a passionate or interested stance in relation to the phenomena in question.

Kierkegaard's view of rationality possesses a further advantage over the traditional view in that it provides us with a more descriptively adequate account of our understanding of ourselves and of the phenomena of our subjective experience. That is, it does not preclude the possibility that our movement from one interpretation of existence to another may take place as a natural or evolutionary development rather than as the result of a choice, but it also allows us to make sense of the experience, that we at least occasionally have, that we *choose* to adopt a particular interpretation of existence, that there are good *reasons* for adopting this interpretation and that we choose to adopt it *for* those reasons and not simply as a matter of pure caprice.

What we have in Kierkegaard's picture of the role of passion in reason is a more "reasonable" picture of reason than the one that has been offered to us by the metaphysical tradition. It is a picture of reason that involves a positive incorporation of what we essentially are, subjects situated in and passionately engaged with the flux which constitutes our temporal existence. Finally, it is a picture that allows us to justify rationally the weight that we seem *compelled*, simply by virtue of the kind of creatures we are, to attribute to our subjective experience.

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NOTES

1. Charles Taylor, "Inescapable Frameworks," in *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 3-24.

2. See note 1 above.

3. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 36-62.

4. This and all subsequent quotations of MacIntyre are taken from page 38 of *After Virtue*.

5. There is some disagreement among Kierkegaard scholars as to the precise number of stages or interpretations of existence that are to be found in Kierkegaard's works. There is general agreement, however, that there are at least the four stages listed here, although there may be perhaps more than these four.

6. It is possible that the status of certain choices as rational will remain constant across frameworks. Candidates for such constancy, however, would most likely be very mundane or innocuous sorts of choices (e.g., the choice of an aspirin to alleviate headache pain).

7. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated by David F. Swenson and Walter

Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 388/*Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker*, edited by A. B. Drachman, J. L. Heiberg and H. O. Lang (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1901-06), Vol. VII, pp. 376-77.

8. *Postscript*, p. 388/*Samlede Værker*, Vol. VII, p. 377.

9. See notes 7 and 8.

10. The failure of many philosophers to appreciate this point is very likely the result of what Thomas Nagel has pointed out is an "ambiguity in the idea of the rational." That is, Nagel observes that "[r]ational" may mean either rationally required or rationally acceptable" (*The View From Nowhere* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1986], p. 200).

11. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 24.

12. Heinrich Schmidinger, *Das Problem des Interesses und die Philosophie Sören Kierkegaards* (Freiberg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 1983), p. 218.

13. Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Religion and Society* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), p. 46.

14. *Philosophical Fragments; Johannes Climacus*, edited and translated by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 170/*Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, edited by P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, E. Torsting and N. Thulstrup (Copenhagen: Glydendal, 1968-78), Vol. IV B 1, p. 149.

15. *Postscript*, p. 278/*Samlede Værker*, Vol. VII, p. 296; *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, translated by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-78), Vol. 5 5621/*Papirer*, Vol. IV B 1, p. 149.

16. *Journals and Papers*, Vol. 2 2283/*Papirer*, Vol. IV C 99; *Journals and Papers*, Vol. 1 891/*Papirer*, Vol. IV B 13: 18.

17. See Schmidinger, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

18. The purpose of Polanyi's claim that probability statements are objectively meaningless is to point out that such statements are essentially ambiguous. Probability statements relating to the behavior of electrons, for example, convey to the researcher that an electron *may* or *may not* be found in a particular spot at a particular time. Since this is something of which the scientist is undoubtedly already aware, even without the aid of the probability statement, Polanyi suggests that this ambiguity may lead one to conclude that probability statements do not *really* say anything. He argues, however, that there is "some meaning in assigning a numerical value to the probability of our finding an electron at a certain place on a particular occasion" (p. 21), but this meaning, he goes on to argue, is to be found in "our personal participation in the event to which the probability statement refers" (p. 21).

19. *Ibid.*, p. 29. The "passionate" or "impassioned" quality of our judgements, statements or assertions is the theme of the section of *Personal Knowledge* entitled "The Nature of Assertions" (pp. 27-30).

20. *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

22. For a comprehensive treatment of the significance of the concept of interest in Kierkegaard's philosophy, see: Heinrich M. Schmidinger, *op. cit.*

23. One might argue that a completely arbitrary choice would still be possible. This is not Kierkegaard's position, however. Kierkegaard believes that we inherit an aesthetic interpretation of existence simply by being human and that we will never adopt any other perspective without a specific reason for doing so; and such a reason cannot arise, on his view, unless we take an interested stance toward the phenomena of our subjective experience.

24. *Postscript*, p. 19/*Samlede Værker*, Vol. VII, p. 6.

25. This situation is perhaps best illustrated by referring to the example of little children. Young children have not yet learned to view their situations dispassionately (and, in general, the younger the children, the more this is true of them), hence their judgements are often informed with a very high degree of passion. Children thus often seize upon even the slightest improbability as grounds for rejecting either the event with which the improbability is associated, or the framework within which the event in question is viewed as improbable. Children playing a game, for example, often refuse to accept that the same person can win even twice in a row. When faced with such a phenomenon they will often attempt either to show that the child in question has not actually won (i.e., that his evaluation of his situation was not correct) or that he cheated.

26. *Postscript*, pp. 169-244/*Samlede Værker*, Vol. VII, pp. 157-211.

27. *Postscript*, p. 117/*Samlede Værker*, Vol. VII, p. 106.

28. *Postscript*, p. 175/*Samlede Værker*, Vol. VII, p. 163.

29. *Journals and Papers*, Vol. 1 492/*Papirer*, Vol. IX A 414. The translation above is from a book called *The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard*, edited by Peter P. Rhode (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1960), p. 150, and not from the Hong and Hong translation of Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*. The Hong translation is not substantially different. I have chosen the former translation, however, because I believe it is a little more readable.

30. This is one of the reasons that Kierkegaard had so little patience with organized Christianity, or, more specifically, with the Lutheran church in Denmark. That is, the version of Christianity offered to Danes by the Danish church was so denatured that the impassioned consciousness would reject it and hence the possibility of the individual's coming to believe the truth of Christianity would be precluded. See *Postscript*, pp. 323-43/*Samlede Værker*, Vol. VII, pp. 312-33.

31. The expression 'worldly' should not be equated with 'material.' 'Worldly' is a much broader determination which encompasses all human pleasures, including intellectual and emotional ones, conceived independently of any religious significance they might have.

32. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the conceptual framework to which an individual subscribes helps to define his experience. This point was clearly not lost on Kierkegaard, as is demonstrated by his observation that "the true conception of despair is indispensable for conscious despair" (*The Sickness Unto Death*, translated by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980], p. 47/*Samlede Værker*, Vol. XI, p. 160). An individual's experience must still, according to Kierkegaard, be assumed to be substantially independent of the framework which helps to define it, or else it cannot have the role in transition from one framework to another that it is described by him as having. This putative independence is strengthened by Nagel's claim that "we don't ascribe such states [e.g., suffering] only to creatures who have mental concepts: we ascribe

them to children and animals, and believe that we ourselves would have experiences even if we didn't have the language" (*op. cit.*, p. 23).

33. This move should not be disturbing to anyone who shares Kierkegaard's religious convictions because *saying* that experience, properly defined, will not necessarily incline one toward a particular interpretation of existence does not make it *so*. If Kierkegaard is correct, then, of course, all roads will lead to Rome, so to speak (i.e., all experience, properly defined, *will* incline one toward a particular interpretation of existence). This is not, however, a matter for philosophers, but is rather between each individual and his or her own experience. That is, it is a matter for each individual as such, and this, according to Kierkegaard, is exactly as it should be.

34. See note 1 above. Such a substitution does not entail that a "need for meaning" is equivalent to "guilt consciousness," but merely that they are criteria of the same kind. That is, both expressions are qualifications of subjective experience, although their content may be quite different.

35. One could not conclude from this, however, that the ethical interpretation is *objectively* more meaningful than the aesthetic interpretation. A foundation of something on the order of Kierkegaard's religious convictions is necessary to sustain that sort of claim. It is enough, however, that one interpretation of existence is *subjectively* more meaningful than another in order for the choice of that interpretation to be viewed as a rational one for the individual in question.

36. *Postscript*, p. 51/*Samlede Værker*, Vol. VII, p. 39.

37. *Op. cit.*, p. 27.