

Frankfurt and Kierkegaard on B.S., Wantonness, and Aestheticism:

A Phenomenology of Inauthenticity

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Abstract. Recent work in analytic moral psychology has returned to themes which were of central importance to major existential philosophers in the continental tradition. In particular, Harry Frankfurt's essays on caring suggest that a kind of motivation distinct from ordinary desire is involved in the kind of long-term goals, relationships, and personal projects that give shape and meaning to our lives. I argue that the process of setting final ends involved in our identity-defining commitments is kind of self-motivation that helps explain how we become autonomous individuals. This is the kind of "willing" that Kierkegaard famously contrasted with the inauthenticity of "aestheticism" -- failure or refusal to take active charge of one's life through passionate devotion to goals worth caring about. The "aesthete" in this sense is similar to Frankfurt's "wanton," who forms no higher-order attitudes towards her own desires and thus is care-less. The aesthete and wanton can further be contrasted with a kind of radical evil that involves existential willing, namely devotion of one's energies to destructive final ends. Against classical eudaimonism, Kierkegaard insists on the possibility of this kind of radical evil. This helps explain why he sees the 'choice' to will an authentic identity or to become earnest as a choice to become serious about good and evil in opposition to the neutrality of the aesthete.

I. Introduction: Kierkegaard, Frankfurt, and Phenomena of Inauthenticity

Connections and overlaps between several themes in Kierkegaard and Frankfurt discussed in this volume were first drawn to scholarly attention by Edward Mooney,¹ who noted in particular the significance of Frankfurtian "caring" as a process of self-articulation. In previous articles, I have referred to Frankfurt's famous distinction between first-order desires and higher-order volitions to help explain what, in *Either/Or* vol. II, the pseudonymous author Judge William means by the cryptic "choice to choose" in ethical terms,² and the related notion of volitional "earnestness" found in several of the pseudonymous works.³ I have also argued that Frankfurt's distinction between volitional "ambiguity" (division in the higher-order will) and "wholeheartedness" sheds light on different types of spiritual division and "sinfulness" in the *Concept of Anxiety*, though Frankfurt's model can be improved by Kierkegaardian insights.⁴ There are also several important differences between Kierkegaard and Frankfurt, especially concerning the status of values worth caring about, or "ethics" in its widest sense. While Frankfurt seems to follow Kant's position that moral duties narrowly understood are objectively binding on all, as his views on caring have developed from his 1985 essay, he has become clearer that caring is not usually based on objective practical reasons or any objective grounds for a thick conception of a meaningful life: instead, life-goals and persons become important to us because we care about them, and we care about them for their own sake either because we can, or because we were destined to care about this kind of end or person.⁵ Like a number of contributors to this volume, I reject this type of "existential subjectivism," and have

critiqued Frankfurt's arguments for it in detail elsewhere.⁶

Yet there are other essays by Frankfurt, in particular his famous piece "On Bullshit"⁷ (here abbreviated as "bs" except when quoting) that unwittingly move closer to Kierkegaard's ethical objectivism. In fact, Frankfurt's analysis of bs is intimately linked with his critique of "wantonness" and his conception of volitional "love" in ways that have not been recognized; it also has deep but largely unexplored connections with analyses of existential "authenticity" and "inauthenticity" in Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. The connections on the positive side may be easier to see. Frankfurt's attempts to explain intrasubjective "identification" with certain first-order motives (and alienation from opposed dispositions) through higher-order volitions,⁸ along with his argument that care and love are distinct from passive inclinations or "erosiac" desires,⁹ are meant as a groundwork for a conception of personal autonomy that explains how we actively form our identity-defining commitments, shape a life that is robustly meaningful to us, and become deeply responsible for our own character. This picture of autonomy shares much with Kierkegaard's pseudonymous portrayal of movements from an "aesthetic" to an "ethical" life-view or volitional orientation, including his emphasis on "infinite pathos" and "infinite resignation."¹⁰ But the connections on the negative side are perhaps even more revealing.

In this essay, I will argue that Frankfurt's critique of bs can be developed by comparison with Kierkegaard's portrayal of aestheticism, and with his excoriation of volitional dissoluteness in his signed works, *The Present Age*¹¹ and *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*.¹² This has the added advantage of showing that the most important points in *Either/Or* are directly repeated or supported by Kierkegaard in his own name. His critique of "the public" in *The Present Age* also helps make clear the overlooked relation between Frankfurt's themes and Heidegger's account of *das Man* (the "They") and "idle talk." Finally, it will help cement all these comparisons to consider the vice of "acedia" and what I'll call "existential boredom." In sum, my claim is that these important *phenomena of inauthenticity* shed light on each other and should be understood together; analyses of them by Frankfurt, Kierkegaard, and others in the existential tradition point towards the same fundamental diagnosis of the underlying 'spiritual' problem.¹³ This in turn will indicate something vital about the conditions of authenticity: the existential telos of personhood requires *alterity* in the form of values worth caring about outside the self. Thus when the full implications of Frankfurt's own concepts are developed in a phenomenology of inauthentic Dasein, we have to revise his account of volitional caring towards "existential objectivism."

This pair of concepts -- authenticity and inauthenticity -- have several importantly different meanings in ordinary language and scholarship. Personal authenticity¹⁴ is often taken to signify simply being true to yourself in the sense of 'following your heart,' for example in not selling out your deepest interests for temporary advantages such as monetary gain. Here authenticity is primarily a mode of self-relation: for example, the hero in the teen movie *Cinderella Story* gives up football for poetry and writing. Since such loyalty to a deeper calling often requires acting contrary to social expectations or the demands of preexisting roles into which one has been cast, authenticity becomes associated with transcending conformism and cultivating originality. Thus in the film *Billy Elliot*, a young boy growing up in a Welsh mining family has no easy time discovering and taking up his love of ballet. Taken a step further, moving beyond passive acceptance of conventional assumptions and roles suggests *Aufklärung*, thinking for oneself or drawing on innate resources of reason and one's life-experiences to form critical judgment with practical relevance for choices. If the "self" to which one remains true involves commitment to moral principles or ideals of excellence articulated in such an enlightened way, then authenticity can mean something very close

to "integrity" in the sense of loyalty to one's principles and ideals. Wyatt Earp and Thomas More are alike in this one respect: neither can be bought and both stay true to their sense of justice. Given that interpersonal relations are often central to the commitments and ideals to which the authentic person remains loyal in the face of external pressures, the integrity connotation easily blends into friendship and also into what we often call "sincerity" in the sense of presenting one's true emotions, devotions, and values to others (or at least to intimate companions). The authentic person does not deceive us about what matters most to them; they do not present a false front or mere semblance of caring.

Thus several closely related character-traits are associated through their connection with the general notion of "authenticity." But to arrive at a useful analysis of this concept, it will not help to start from loyalty to the heart, or integrity, or originality, or sincerity, since each of these "proto-virtues" (as I have called them¹⁵) are also interpreted in multiple ways in moral psychology today: instead, we need to identify the most fundamental psychological structure underlying these facets of authenticity to guide our explication of the different dimensions of authentic character. Of course, in explaining common experience of character-traits connected with authenticity, we might have to adjust or correct our interpretation of the fundamental structure: phenomenology is a process of reflective equilibrium. However, we must begin from a hypothesis or proposal about the fundamental structure as an initial basis for the relevance of the phenomena we consider. In the tradition of existential phenomenology, this is called a "prolepsis" or "forehaving."

II. Authenticity and Projective Will: A Proleptic Hypothesis

In recent analytic work in moral psychology and in older work by existential philosophers, authenticity has something to do with an active way in which we arrive at purposes, relationships, and values that define us in the practical sense: our "practical identity" or "self" consists in part of projects and ideals that are central to our sense of what our life is *for*.¹⁶ Of course individual style is important because two people can have similar goals and values but pursue them differently;¹⁷ and of course we also exist in concrete historical contexts, particular times and places. But our social identity, including our interpersonally recognized roles, habits, and personality traits, has at its core an *existential identity* that can be -- to a significant extent -- a result of our effort to fashion a life worth living. This is closely linked with the idea of a life that is rich in first-personal meaning, that is meaning *to the agent* living it. This is not the same as a happy life, or a virtuous or morally righteous life, nor even an authentic life, but we suspect a deep connection between authentic devotion to worthwhile ends and ideals, authentic appreciation of values worth caring about, and a sense of robust significance in one's activities. An authentic life cannot be one that seems utterly pointless or aimless or meaningless to its agent; existential "absurdity" is a bar to full authenticity.¹⁸

Frankfurt conceives the first-personal meaning of a life as a result of caring about people, projects, and personal ambitions that motivate productive work;¹⁹ Bernard Williams similarly conceives a rich or fulfilling life as one in which commitments to family, friends, "intellectual" and "creative" goals, and to political "causes" play a central role.²⁰ He defines "ground projects" as final ends that one would be willing to die for, although he also recognizes other commitments that are not as absolute as that.²¹ The idea of "identity-defining commitments"²² or cares and higher-order volitions as central to one's "practical identity" has become widespread;²³ yet no one seems to have a satisfying explanation of how such cares, commitments, or personal projects are formed or what they consist in. If they are simply interests and emotional dispositions that are a function of our contingent history, or the social forces that shape us, or desires that are instinctive in our kind, then

they seem less than fully autonomous. But if they are simply the result of arbitrary choices, then again it is hard to see them as manifestations of self-governance or self-rule. I will not try to answer this old problem in full here, but merely summarize the beginning of an answer developed in my recent book *Will as Commitment and Resolve*. It aims to explain how we can form new final ends, or reinforce our determination to pursue goals already set, or alter our projects when necessary. I argue that in standard human experience, these are active processes, not merely changes that happen to us: although they are distinct from making decisions or forming particular intentions, the setting and reshaping of final ends is a special type of agentive process that is existentially central in our lives because it forms and sustains our identity-defining relationships, cares, and projects.

There is another interesting way of stating this thesis. While "willing" and "volition" have several different senses in our philosophical heritage, including most prominently making decisions or forming plans and intentions, they also include "strength of will" or heroic striving to overcome obstacles and persist against adversity. Willing in this striving sense implicitly includes, in my view, the end-setting function of agency. Human persons normally have the capacity to reinforce present motives and to *generate motivation* by setting new final ends that do not merely derive from pre-existing desires, including even the general desire for happiness (*pace* Plato, Aristotle, and the whole eudaimonist tradition). In projecting new life-goals, or renewing commitment to standing aims and projects, the agent can transcend her existing desires in response to values that either do not already move her, or that move her but without accounting for the entire strength and direction of the motivation in her resulting intention to act. I call this "projective motivation" to suggest that it is actively formed by the agent in the process of making new plans or renewing or altering existing intentions, and to contrast it with motivation that is "erosiac," meaning passively experienced as caused by the prepurposive appearance of some lack or need. When standing desires, emotions, or other motives are merely directed to particular acts as means to their ends, or as specifications of those ends, the direction and strength of the "purposive" motivation embedded in the resulting intention may be derived entirely from the prior sources. But contra Hume, not all motivation in human agents begins this way: some is worked up by active effort of will, by resolve or unification of one's energies into a purpose that transcends prior needs and inclinations in devotion to ends that may have nothing to do with our material well-being or even the welfare of friends and kin. Following this model, my hypothesis is that authenticity is achieved by such devotion to goals beyond one's own natural interests, including one's drive to completion. Authentic self-realization may require certain forms of attention-to-self, but it first requires that one recognize and embrace ends distinct from self-realizations as worthy of our love.

In what follows, we will see that insights in both Frankfurt and Kierkegaard are explained well by this hypothesis and thus support it; with some modifications to Frankfurt, their analyses converge on this kind of volitional explanation of authenticity and its various aspects. If we take authenticity to be part of our existential *telos* -- a state that we must attain to fulfill our nature -- then cultivation of the projective will through cares and loves will be essential to our development. This is the development towards full selfhood that Kierkegaard's famous existential stages or life-views are meant to display, beginning with the 'default' attitudes of unawakened aestheticism. But before we consider aesthetes, let us consider their close kindred the bs-ers.

III. Frankfurt on BS and Volitional Wantonness.

In the last few years, Frankfurt's small book on bs has already sold over 400,000 copies.²⁴ Its popularity has led to a huge wave of publicity and interest, along with reviews in major magazines

and newspapers, and even television interviews -- proving that philosophers are capable of reaching mass audiences. This may be largely a result of marketing, but Frankfurt's topic must resonate quite widely to get this much attention. We might compare it to the minor sensation that Kierkegaard produced with his pseudonymous "Seducer's Diary" in *Either/Or I* near the beginning of his authorship.²⁵ Just as the 19th century Danish public largely assumed that the "Diary" was written for amusement, readers today probably assume from its title that Frankfurt's essay is meant as a joke or lighthearted fun. I do not think so; Frankfurt occasionally indulges in bits of levity, but his tone is usually earnest. Yet even professional philosophers who understand the serious intent of Frankfurt's book/essay have not appreciated its full significance, which emerges only in comparison with a line of thought beginning with Socrates's critique of the Sophists and culminating with existential critiques of neutrality, insincerity, and superficial public identities. While Frankfurt's accounts of free will, autonomy, and caring are highly influential in contemporary moral psychology, scholars who evaluate on this work ignore important connections with the essay on bs²⁶. We can begin to appreciate these links by drawing further distinctions that are only implied in the essay on bs.

Frankfurt's Thesis. As many reviewers have remarked, Frankfurt's key thesis in his essay on bs. is that a bs.er is worse than a liar. He distinguishes the intentional state of a liar L (who tries to bring about that his interlocutor believes something X, and believes that L believes X and that L has communicated this belief, when in fact L regards X as false) from another intentional state (called "bullshit" or "humbug") in which the agent talks about ideas or claims X, but not *because* he believes that X is true *or* false. As Frankfurt puts it, this "lack of connection to a concern with truth" in one's speech is the distinguishing feature of bs (OB, 33). Frankfurt is surely right about the importance of this distinction (whether or not he is right about common usages of the word "bs.," as hundreds of online commentators fail to see). For, as Frankfurt says, the bs.er attempts to convince others that she believes that some claim X is true (or probable), and she is to that extent straightforwardly dishonest about her intention -- but not in the way that lying is (OB, 54).

Cohen's Two Criticisms of Frankfurt's Account. However, in an insightful response nicely titled "Deeper into Bullshit,"²⁷ G.A. Cohen argues that Frankfurt confuses the bs.er's *own* indifference to the truth-value of his statements (explicit or implied) with "the bullshitter's not caring whether his audience is caused to believe something true or false."²⁸ Cohen's point is that these can come apart: someone who is herself concerned about the truth or falsehood of some claim X might want her audience to believe X, but for reasons *other* than wanting them to know a truth or to believe a falsehood. For it might just be materially advantageous for her in some way if the audience believes X, whether it is true or false; for example, consider exaggeration in advertizing. But this kind of bs. does not seem obviously worse for human society than outright lying.

Cohen also objects that "while Frankfurt identifies the liar by his goal, which is to mislead with respect to reality, he assigns no distinctive goal to the bullshitter..." but only a standard "tactic." While "Frankfurt's bullshitter asserts statements whose truth-values are of no interest to him, and he conceals *that* fact," he can do so for "a variety of goals."²⁹ This point reveals a problem in Frankfurt's analysis, though Cohen misdiagnoses it. Cohen acknowledges that the "standard" goal by which he and Frankfurt define the liar need not be the liar's "ultimate or final goal;"³⁰ it rarely is, since it is perverse simply to intend that someone else be mistaken, or mistaken because they trusted us, as a final end (why delight in that?). Similarly, we should define Frankfurian bs. by a standard *proximate* goal, and the kind of communicative act so defined could still be done for a

variety of final ends: e.g. getting paid, amusing an audience, staving off boredom, creating a diversion, taking revenge, or even exposing fashionable intellectual nonsense by parody.³¹ So it is consistent with Frankfurt's approach that bs.ing be used as a mere means to many different final ends.³² The real problem in Frankfurt's account is that does not provide such a standard proximate goal: as Cohen says, the bs.er “lacks any goal such as that by which the liar is defined.”³³

Frankfurt responds to Cohen that “The defining feature of the sort of bullshit that I considered is a lack of concern with truth, or an indifference to how things really are.”³⁴ This could be construed as a *negative* proximate goal that guides the communicative acts in question: if the communicative act has a declarative (as opposed to interrogative or imperative) illocutionary mode, yet the agent is not trying to produce true or false belief through her communication, then her act is an instance of bs. But this negative condition is too wide: for it would count as bs. all cases in which a person says whatever comes to mind without concern about truth or falsity, even if merely to entertain a small child, or to comfort an ailing elderly friend, or for other benign purposes in contexts where “small talk” is appropriate enough. Yet Frankfurt means to isolate an existentially problematic phenomenon in human life: “Characterizing something as bullshit is naturally construed as a serious perjorative.”³⁵ And facts of usage aside, what we are really interested in isolating is the underlying intentional attitude that deserves such disapproval or rebuke.³⁶ To accomplish this, we need to find a more *positive* description of its definitive proximate end.³⁷

BS., Wantonness, and the Categorical/Evaluative Distinction. The problem we have found in Frankfurt’s negative condition for bs. is interestingly similar to a problem with his closely related notion of the “wanton,” who is defined as lacking 2nd-order volitions concerning her own 1st-order motives (in contrast to “persons” who take an active stand with respect to their own 1st-order motives, *identifying with* some and *alienating* others).³⁸ While this idea of higher-order volitions and identification with first-order desire has been the topic of intense debate in the literature on personal autonomy ever since Frankfurt introduced it in 1971, it should at least be clear that there is an analogy between the wanton who has no higher-order will and the bs.er (though Frankfurt never compares them):³⁹ just as the bs.er remains unconcerned about the truth-value of what he is saying, and consequently couldn't give a damn whether the beliefs or attitudes that his listeners acquire from him are true or false (or probable/improbable, warranted/unwarranted, etc), the wanton is unconcerned about which 1st-order desires move her to action. We might express this relation by saying that Frankfurt’s bs.er has a “wanton” attitude to the truth: he identifies neither with a project of honesty, nor a project of lying. Thus the attitude that disposes to bs.ing is wanton in at least one important aspect.⁴⁰ We can illustrate this analogy in the following diagram:

Table 1:

	<u>Attitudes towards motives</u>		<u>Attitudes towards truth-value</u>	
Lacking the categorical condition	wanton		bs-er	
Meeting the categorical condition	Identifying w. motive M ₁	Alienating motive M ₁	Aiming at true belief	Aiming at false belief

A "categorical" condition, as Ronald de Sousa explains, is a teleological orientation towards some type of value that is intrinsic to an intentional state of natural kind K: such states aim at a distinct

type of rationality R (which de Sousa calls K's "formal object").⁴¹ In this schema, the R-standard applies when the categorical conditions for being an instance of K are met: such an instance tries to fulfill the R-standard, but does not necessarily reach them. For example, beliefs are about the world and try to correspond with reality; they fail if they are false. Thus trying and failing to attain R is distinct from not even being in the R-game; for example, imagining what it would be like if a certain proposition P were true does not fail if P is false. This can be broadened from intentional states to the kind of beings for whom these states are natural. For example, Aristotle's claim that "man is a rational animal" must be taken in the categorical sense, since it is natural for us to form beliefs, but our beliefs are often irrational or unwarranted: "The evaluative sense presupposes the categorical sense: to be either rational or irrational (evaluatively) is to be rational (categorically)."⁴² De Sousa applies this schema to emotions: they naturally aim at a kind of "appropriateness" relative to the agent's situation. Thus an inappropriate emotion is still meets the categorical conditions of emotional intentionality, whereas a being without emotions cannot succumb to such emotional irrationality, because its states do not aim at emotional appropriateness; they are not even "minimally rational" in the sense that is a necessary precondition for emotional irrationality.⁴³

This two-level pattern is repeated for several kinds of intentional states. A tradition from Socrates to Habermas holds that communicative action is naturally oriented towards truth (or belief warranted by evidence alone): the liar who aims at deception is categorically communicative in this sense, since she participates in social practices to which this truth-standard is intrinsic; but she exploits it by intentionally failing to meet its requirements for strategic advantage. In other words, she plays the game, which involves at least implicit acknowledgment of the rules, but she cheats. As Frankfurt's analysis of bs. shows, this is distinct from ignoring or rejecting the standard that defines the practice altogether. A small child who says something that he believes is false because he wants to copy an older sibling is not lying, for he does not yet know how to play that game.

Perhaps we can apply de Sousa's model to higher-order volitions in Frankfurt's sense. Like the bs.er who is not really engaged in the communicative game (on this robust understanding of it), beings that Frankfurt calls "wanton" lack a categorical condition of "personhood" that we might call rationality in one's own first-order motives (the motives that are most accessible to interpretation by others, which therefore figure most saliently in one's social persona). On this view, higher-order volition is constituted in part by the rational standard implied by its natural function, which is to care about the first-order motives on which we act. However, Frankfurt has resisted the idea that there is any rational standard implicit in the function of superintending one's first-order motives.⁴⁴

Frankfurt first illustrated the idea of wantonness with his famous "wanton addict" who "cannot or does not care which of his conflicting first-order desires wins out;" this is due either to "his lack of capacity for reflection or to his mindless indifference to the enterprise of evaluating his own desires and motives."⁴⁵ The trouble again is that Frankfurt's concept is defined negatively: he does not distinguish between *essentially* wanton beings (such as "nonhuman animals ...and very young children"⁴⁶) who cannot form higher-order volitions or identify with certain actual or possible motives or alienate opposing motives, and *contingently* wanton older humans who could take such a higher-order stand but do not. For the first class, it is psychologically impossible to form a higher-order will; for the second, the absence of higher-order volitions demands an explanation. Frankfurt focuses on the second class in contrasting the wanton addict with an "unwilling" addict who alienates his addictive craving and with a "willing" addict who identifies with his compulsive motive.⁴⁷ But this second class must be subdivided into those who simply fail to care about their first-order motives (call them 'unawakened' or 'accidental' wantons), and those who *intentionally*

refrain from forming commitments involving higher-order volitions (call them 'voluntary wantons'). For example, Pippin and Merry start off in the *Lord of the Rings* as accidental wantons interested primarily in fun-loving tomfoolery,⁴⁸ and then grow into more caring agents; whereas a Stendhal famously aimed at spontaneity and immediacy. We can expand this taxonomy as follows:

1. Essentially wanton animals (psychologically unable to form higher-order volitions)
 - (A) Non-human animals;
 - (B) Human beings who are too young or mentally incapacitated to form higher-order volitions;
2. Contingently wanton animals (with the requisite mental capacities for higher-order will)
 - (A) Accidentally wanton human beings to whom it has not yet occurred to form higher-order attitudes towards their own 1st-order motives;
 - (B) Voluntarily wanton human beings who intentionally omit to form higher-order volitions
 - (i) through tacit or unacknowledged refusal to engage this capacity when it is called for, or
 - (ii) through explicit and reflectively acknowledged refusal according to plan.

This further subdivision of class 2B recognizes that 2nd-order volitions may be avoided either through self-deceptive inattention or in more explicit awareness of this stance (which constitutes a minimal 3rd-order volition not to permit any 2nd-order volitions).

Such voluntary wantons are more disturbing than both accidental and essential wantons, because they make some positive effort to *remain* wanton. Similarly, some actions that would count as bs. under Frankfurt's wide negative condition are distinguished by the agent's positive intention *not* to concern herself with the truth-value of her statements or consequent beliefs in her listeners -- that is, her intention to *omit* caring about the warrant-status of her claims and of her interlocutors' resulting beliefs. Such a person, we might say, practices *detachment* from the primary concerns to which communicative action normally commits us.⁴⁹ She intentionally *refrains* in her communicative act from aiming at the normal proximate goal of conveying truth or falsehood.⁵⁰

This could be for several reasons: (1) Perhaps, like Eddie Murphy in the film *Beverly Hills Cop*, she is merely using bs. as a means to some material advantage; we can call such an agent an instrumental bs.er. As Cohen noted, such agents bs. intentionally, though they would not bs. if they believed other means would be more effective in securing their ends. (2) Things are worse if she is in the grip of an ideology that values spontaneity in communication without the 'narrow shackles' of concern for truth or better warranted beliefs. (3) Worse still, perhaps she is a skeptic who thinks that the very ideas of truth and warrant are bunk. As Jonathan Lear argues in response to Frankfurt, the bs. which fills many public addresses in the United States today is often more brazen than Frankfurt indicates, since the speaker is open about the fact that she cares little whether the content of her claims are true or false.⁵¹ Rather than trying to hide her unconcern about the truth-value of what she says, or lull her audience into mistaken confidence that she knows what she is talking about (like the ancient sophists), this type of bs.er corrupts society by inviting audiences to join her reveling in oratorical flourish and other rhetorical devices while ignoring the possible truth or falsehood of what is said. She encourages her listeners to focus on form of delivery rather than the substance. Even if what she says happens to be accurate, she seduces them to participate in her cynical refusal to care about, or even believe in, objective truth.⁵² Against concern about truth-values, such a bs.er aims not at deception, but rather at promoting the value of power or charisma. He invites us to join in his higher ideal, which scoffs at the mere liar who remains bound to the old illusion of objective

truth and its opposite. No doubt this kind of skeptical sophistry is corrosive, as Frankfurt suggest in his follow-up book *On Truth*.⁵³ It is especially destructive to deliberative democracy, which disintegrates into mere tyranny of majority desires, the collective rule of blind prejudice and brute preference. This is what Kierkegaard means by the anonymous "public" that he reviles as spiritually hollow in *The Present Age*.

(4) But Kierkegaard is even more concerned about self-deceptive bs. Consider an agent who is too dissolute to face the difficulties involved in caring about the truth-value of controversial and important ideas or beliefs -- especially those that could make a deep practical difference in the conduct of her life -- but who finds herself carried along by the common expectation to interact through speech; so she complies with vacuous talk.⁵⁴ This is the type of bs-er that Kierkegaard has in mind when he asks in *The Present Age* "what is it to chatter?" and answers "It is the annulment of the passionate disjunction between being silent and speaking" (TA, 97). Note that the distinction between categorical and evaluative levels is found again here: the chatterer lacks the passion either for authentic speech *or* silence. He lacks the authorship necessary for genuine "conversation between man and man;" his talk becomes pure gossip, "garrulous confiding" about nothing that really matters to him, for "the aim is to find something to chatter about" (TA, 99). In other words, the dissolute bs.er aims at self-distraction more than any further goal. It is possible to do this in writing as well as speech. Some people not only write anonymously, but even "write anonymously over their own signature:" there is no conviction or spirit in their work (TA, 103). Such a writer is not in the essential sense "an author;" for he does not meet the categorical condition of being either a good or bad author.

We now seem closer to isolating a distinctive proximal goal of the communicative act-type that Frankfurt considers damaging to human society and to the agents who perform it. In forms (2), (3), and (4), bs. involves intending distinctive ends. In these noninstrumental forms, it resembles species of the general pattern of attitudes and motives that Kierkegaard calls "aestheticism."

IV. Frankfurtian BS., Acedia, and Kierkegaardian Aestheticism

Aestheticism and BS. In Kierkegaard's broad sense of the term, "aestheticism" is not (as the label might suggest) simply a way of life focused on the beautiful, but rather an encompassing attitude or practical orientation towards choices that puts the agent *beneath* good and evil: unlike the resolutely evil agent who knows that she is violating moral norms but accepts this price (or even delights in it for sheer rebellion), the aesthete does not take seriously the moral appropriateness or inappropriateness of her acts. She may (speculatively) recognize the authority of ethical ideals and standards, but she does not personally appropriate them or give them motive-force in her life. We find here another range of causes from accidental failure through voluntary but tacit consent, to fully intentional action. The aesthetes presented in *Either/Or* I range from pure sensualists like Mozart's "Don Giovanni" who use others for erotic pleasure⁵⁵ and prudent "shopkeepers" who care only for material advantage, to more reflective figures like the young man "A" who writes the morose and obsessive "Diapsalmata" and cynical treatises like "The Rotation of Crops," ending with the sentimental and complex "Johannes" who keeps the "Seducer's Diary."⁵⁶ Like the accidental wanton, the most unconscious or childish of these aesthetes may not recognize his failure to form commitments that could be deeply good or evil. Others, like "A" in his treatises, self-consciously advocate an aesthetic life while repressing awareness of its frivolity. By the time of his Preface to the "Seducer's Diary," however, A is clearly more disturbed; against his will, he is awakening to the hollowness and absurdity of the Seducer's way of life.⁵⁷ The Seducer himself seems father along: he

has embraced superficiality in full reflective determination to cultivate emotions and experiences that seem beautiful or full of amoral meaning; he forms the *project* of remaining wanton.⁵⁸ While the category is named for the Seducer's attitude towards beauty, the essence of aestheticism in all these forms is the absence of commitments taken up *as* ethically good or evil.

If we compare this range of aesthetes to our taxonomy of wantons and to the types of bs.ers, the key analogy should be obvious: Frankfurt's bs.er is to the value of Truth as Kierkegaard's aesthete is to the Good in general. These agents fail, avoid, or refuse outright to care about the value-ideal that is implicit in communication on the one hand, and in what I called *projective willing* on the other. Expanding our previous table, we have the following:

Table 2

<u>Attitudes towards ends worth caring about (or identity-defining commitments)</u>	<u>Attitudes towards one's own 1st-order motives</u>	<u>Attitudes towards truth-value of communicated contents</u>
aesthete	wanton	bs-er
Ethically good projects/cares Ethically evil projects/cares	Identifying w. motive M ₁ Alienating motive M ₁	Aiming at true belief Aiming at false belief

Of course, this analogy involves the controversial thesis that there *is* an ethical telos naturally connected to projective motivation and higher-order will. But if the relevant phenomena fit this analogy, then it provides some support for this thesis. Consider the following example. Imagine that you are in Kant's famous dilemma about what to say when a person obviously bent on murder comes to your door, seeking the intended victim whom you are sheltering. Seen as a weighty moral choice, the salient options are to tell the truth or (better) to lie. But seen aesthetically as just an intriguing curiosity, the situation suggests a third alternative: try to bs. your way out, and at least the outcome will provide interesting material for entertainment or reflection. Indeed we seem to have more than an analogy here: when avoiding concern for weighty ethical considerations becomes a central goal in one's life, we such a practice of bs. becomes a *species* of aestheticism.

Johannes in "The Seducer's Diary" is the paradigm aesthete: his romantic attentions to his "Cordelia" are neither a simple deception nor a straightforward lie (for he really is attracted to her), but rather a kind of bs. that hides his real detachment from both her emotions *and* his own.⁵⁹ Most people are earnest emoters in this sense: they want their emotional responses to events, situations, and other persons reflect the positive or negative values in those experiences, because such expression of value is an end-in-itself. Sensitive emotional response may be beneficial to us in several ways, but accurate expression of the values we encounter in the intentional object of the emotion is inherently appropriate. So normal agents guided by this telos of emotion do not view emotional expression of the salient values as a *mere means* to any further end or goal.⁶⁰ By contrast, Johannes the Seducer is an emotional bs.er: his emotions towards Cordelia are not feigned or simply pretended, but he also does not care about the intrinsic appropriateness of these emotions. He only wants to take a kind of *sentimental pleasure* in contemplating Cordelia's erotic pathos and his own 1st-order emotional response to her (both in the moment and in later reflection): from the speculative standpoint, these passions appear beautiful in their tension, and therefore "interesting."⁶¹ For his only real goal is to avoid boredom by preserving "the interesting."⁶²

Boredom and Acedia. However, just as there are several types of bs., there is more than one form of boredom. Ordinary boredom, as I'll call it, is just a state of disappointed expectation of aesthetic or intellectual goods: when kids are hoping for some entertainment or thrill and these desired goods fail to materialize, they say that are "bored." Similarly, adults may be bored with a class, lecture, movie, or novel that they expected to be enlightening or moving or informative, but was not. In these cases, an ordinary human desire for interesting activity is frustrated. This differs from boredom as a mood without the absence of any particular expected good as its intentional object. The empty listlessness of a hot summer day when we can't pin down exactly what's missing or why everything seems dull differs from the tedium a child may experience on a long car ride. Mood-boredom in turn can be due to external circumstances that block intrinsically worthwhile activity (such as prison), or due to an internal lassitude of the will. The latter type, which I call *existential boredom*, is what Frankfurt has in mind when he writes that boredom is more than an unpleasant feeling; it is a loss of psychic "vitality" due to not caring about anything going on around us.⁶³ In this sense, a wanton who literally cared about nothing and therefore made no effort "to maintain any thematic unity of coherence" in their desires⁶⁴ would be existentially bored. Such agents lead lives that are insignificant to them. Even in less extreme cases,

...they may be emotionally shallow; or they may lack vitality; or they may be chronically indecisive. To the extent that they do actively choose and pursue certain goals, they may devote themselves to such insipid ambitions that their experience is generally dull... In consequence, their lives may be relentlessly banal and hollow and -- whether they recognize this about themselves -- they may be dreadfully bored.⁶⁵

Such deep existential boredom comes from lacking significant purpose; it is a symptom of *acedia* -- the vice of sloth -- as Gabrielle Taylor interprets it. In Taylor's sense, "acedia" is not simple laziness, idleness, or complacency (as it was classically understood),⁶⁶ but rather a voluntary failure to form cares or commitments that could define a meaningful life. Thus Goncharov's character Oblomov sees

that there are worthwhile things to achieve in life, which he will not achieve because he will not make the effort, because he cannot get himself sufficiently engaged with what he thinks worthwhile to push him into activity.⁶⁷

Acedia so understood is very similar, Taylor rightly notes, to the attitude of "Kierkegaard's aestheticist" who sees "nothing worth engaging with."⁶⁸ However, while Oblomov seems similar to the Kierkegaard's "A," the more fully awakened Seducer actively refuses to recognize objective values beyond aesthetic pleasure because caring about them involves true attachment, investment of self, and this risk of suffering. Acedia, like this sophisticated aestheticism, leads to a particular kind of boredom that is compatible with what Taylor calls superficial busyness.⁶⁹ Haunted by the absence of an identity based on earnest devotion to concrete final ends, the aesthete seeks to escape the displeasure of existential boredom by various kinds of distraction: e.g. playing with roles and relationships without real engagement, curiosity without deep interest, seductions carried out as lightminded experiments without any commitment to love. All such distractions are forms of bs. in the *existential* sense, since they amount to so many ways of refusing to endorse the *truth or weight* of values that we ought to care about for their own sake.

Existential BS and Heideggerian 'Idle Talk.' We have traced the problem underlying

Frankfurt's concern about bs. to its root. As Cohen saw, common instrumental bs. consists in ignoring putative truth and falsehood in the contents of one's communication as a mere means to an indefinite variety of final ends. Since this instrumental value of such common bs. is contingent on circumstance, the ordinary bs.er is likely to take this attitude towards truth-value occasionally or intermittently. This evinces a certain light-mindedness analogous to the typical hedonism or materialism of the unreflective aesthete. By contrast, existential bs. is a deeper attitude that denies, refuses, or at least demotes the objective importance of normative truth (and thereby any other agent-transcending value) as a *final* end for human life. It is not merely a matter of passive "indifference to truth,"⁷⁰ but of active opposition to caring about truth, even in the way that liars have to care about it. Whether to express radical skepticism or to avoid responsibility, such a person forms the 2nd-order volition not to identify with motives that involve truth or warrant as a final end; but this higher-order will to bs. is usually not explicitly articulated by the agent.

Thus existential bs. is not intermittent or occasional: it is an orientation that comes to pervade one's attitudes towards anything that might matter in one's life; it is a way of life rooted in a self-effacing project of avoiding the kinds of cares and commitments that require serious and sincere communication with others. This is the distinctive goal that gives us a positive definition of bs. It requires self-deception simply because there are so many goods worth caring about in the world outside oneself: in the practices or professions (such as the arts or sciences), in relationships with other persons, in social movements and political causes, and perhaps in religious callings -- to list only the most familiar. But caring about such goals comes with a high price: it requires commitment to ideals of excellence and the interpersonal relationships involved in their pursuit, and hence concern about both (a) the truth of what one communicates to others in these activities and relationships, and (b) about making the sincerity of one's activity known to them. As suggested, it also requires willingness to experience those emotions that are appropriate given one's cares and commitments in relation to the actual situations one confronts in the world. By contrast, existential bs. fends off life's call to earnestness and escapes the price that one must often pay for caring about truth and about the persons to whom it is communicated for their own sake.⁷¹

Once we see that the underlying goal that constitutes existential bs. characterizes not only isolated speech-acts but an whole way of being in a world -- an orientation that levels off the deep practical significance of goals, activities and relationships worthy of sincere devotion, leaving only superficial values -- we can also see that this attitude is also a *social* phenomenon in a deeper sense than either Frankfurt or Lear make clear. To see this, it helps to compare existential bs. with Martin Heidegger's notion of "idle talk" in which the anonymous "they" (*das Man*) say things without the "primary relationship-of-Being towards the entity talked about."⁷² The "primary relationship" or natural attitude to which Heidegger refers is what he calls *disclosure*, or letting things reveal their true character without distortion by preconceptions. Although it is part our *telos* on Heidegger's conception, this kind of clarity is never easy to achieve, but it is essential to "authenticity" as Heidegger conceives it. Heidegger borrows from Kierkegaard the idea that we may achieve such clarity by grasping our own mortality, or choosing in the face of death.⁷³ Probably this is not the only way to achieve normative clarity, but there is something to the idea that facing death helps us come to terms with what matters most to us, or what is most worth caring about -- in other words, that it helps us cut through the bs. that builds up a barrier between us and the deep values that are most relevant for projective motivation, obscuring them from view.

Like Frankfurt, Heidegger also notes that "idle talk" is distinct from intentionally lying: "Idle talk does not have the kind of Being which belongs to consciously passing off something as

something else.”⁷⁴ Rather, idle talk, like gossip, passes off questionable claims as something taken for granted, or as something everybody knows, and thus it discourages earnest critical inquiry or deep understanding of the reasons for or against such a claim. For example, consider the way that the Heritage Foundation has taught most Americans to assume that “liberal” means favoring a nebulous something called “Big Government,” which is a menacing albeit vague combination of high taxes for the sake of waste and Orwell’s “Big Brother.” When common in a society, such catch-phrases and images foster knee-jerk reactions that control average, everyday thinking: as Heidegger puts it, “The dominance of the public way in which things have been interpreted”⁷⁵ intervenes between us and how things really are. In Frankfurt’s terms, what this means is that the average Joe is caught in an invisible net of bs. that undermines the deliberative processes that alone can justify democratic law-making. Ideologies are especially strong nets of this kind, because people caught in them are unaware of their pervasive influence and the blinders they impose. People living in societies ruled by such ideologies are trained away from “the primordially genuine relationship-of-Being towards the world” (i.e. our natural orientation towards truth) and are kept “floating unattached” to hard facts, floating with others in the superficial camaraderie of bs.⁷⁶

V. Authentic Willing: Kierkegaard's Attack on Aesthetic Culture

At this point we can return to our initial hypothesis that authenticity is achieved by the striving will in projective motivation -- that is in setting new ends and reforming old ones, in devoting oneself and unifying one's energies through the effort of sustained commitment. "Will" in this sense refers to the kind of "effort" that Oblomov would not make. Nowhere in the existential tradition is this idea clearer than in Kierkegaard's riveting, direct, and devastating critique of "The Present Age" of his own culture. In this signed work, Kierkegaard portrays mid-19th century Europe as a period of reflective detachment, indolence, shrewd egoism, and superficiality that has lost the passionate engagement and heroic will-power of the preceding revolutionary age (PA 69).⁷⁷ The revolutionary age had its demons, but it was not lukewarm. In the present age, aestheticism is linked to bs. Kierkegaard suggests that the irresoluteness of Europe in his time is related to its being an "age of publicity," in which announcements and committee meetings substitute for action and bureaucracy saps decisiveness: he asks "if a whole generation could be presumed to have the diplomatic task of procrastinating and of continually frustrating any action and yet make it seem as if something were happening..." (PA 70); it almost sounds as if he were describing the U.N. today. True political revolution, like true scholarship, have been replaced by simulacra (Ibid). In this situation, even a bad decision is better than no resolve, or the mere illusion of willing: "Even if it is a rash leap, if only it is decisive, and if you have the makings of a man, the danger of life's severe judgment upon your recklessness will help you become one" (PA 71).

This is almost an exact repetition of the pseudonym Judge William's claim in *Either/Or II* that "choosing oneself" in earnest commitment to a task, role, or relationship will strengthen conscience and make ethical considerations more salient, even if one's particular choices are not all perfect from the start. In fact, the main goal of *The Present Age* is to develop this central thesis of *Either/Or II* that personal authenticity starts with the primordial "choice" to make serious choices or form commitments to projects, roles, and relationships in light of their broad ethical value. But Kierkegaard makes two crucial additions to the Judge's analyses. First, he develops the social dimension of aestheticism through clarifying the normative basis of willing. Second, he defends the converse of Judge William's thesis: just as volitional initiative helps clarify ethical sensibility, volitional weakness loosens our cognitive grasp on values because the importance of many contrasts

can be appreciated only from an engaged perspective. In other words, Kierkegaard diagnoses bs. and idle talk partly as *symptoms* of volitional shallowness. The problem is that these symptoms worsen the spiritual disease. Because willing also requires conviction concerning the worth of goals and persons to whom we dedicate our efforts, a dulled normative sensibility makes it harder to "stand" for anything.⁷⁸ Thus bs. and aestheticism are two sides of a vicious circle.

These two developments of the Judge's thesis are woven together in *The Present Age*. Like the aesthetes of the pseudonymous works, typical people in Kierkegaard's culture are described as "spectators" rather than "participants;" they have forgotten that "a person stands or falls on his actions" (PA 73). They have grown incapable of the sincere admiration of greatness that heroic pathos requires (PA 72). These problems are linked because willing (in the projective sense) is a response to a personal experience of *deep value* rather than an arbitrary choice. This crucial point explains why it becomes harder to will earnestly when society popularizes cynical reflection and trivialities in place of "primitive experiences" of value (PA 73). Sensitivity to value and passionate response, in contrast to the money valued by the bourgeois, constitute a kind of existential "asset" (PA 74), following the biblical metaphor of spiritual riches. Art and literature can build up such assets: "a well-grounded ethical view" with an ideal of "nobility" and "unselfishness" that can inspire volitional initiative (PA 74).

The Russian novelist Solzhenitsyn recognized a similar existential function for art in its capacity to break through "the lie" on which violence depends: when opposing ideology, "One word of truth is of more weight than all the rest of the world."⁷⁹ But it is not only the lies of revolutionary violence that art must fight in order to free us from delusion: sometimes instead it must cut through bs. Kierkegaard describes a more subtle miasma that "lets everything remain but subtly drains the meaning out of it" by obscuring ethical contrasts in "equivocation" and vague insinuation (PA 77). Terms that were fully meaningful only in relation to resolute devotion still remain in use, but they are subtly robbed of the live significance they once had (PA 81). In our day, we see this when terms like "rights," "family values," and "big government," and even "racism" are so misused that they reduced to mere catchphrases or emotive triggers. Again, comparison to Heidegger is helpful: "*das Man*" or the "They" is an average or everyday sense of things in which the deeper meanings that could form the basis for personal appropriation or heroic striving are leveled off. The dominance of such an encompassing web of bs. in the "ambiguity and equivocation" of polite society conceals the lassitude of the individual's will, making this illness difficult to detect and "root out" (PA, 80).

This collective state of hollow banter and loss of meaning reflects the volitional void of its individual members. Aesthetic amoralism is characterized for Kierkegaard by ambiguity and flux in which nothing is held absolute and no stand is taken: "Morality is character; character is something engraved, but the sea has no character, nor does sand, nor abstract common sense [*das Man*], either, for character is inwardness" (PA 77-78). By contrast, even a radically evil agent has character in her volitional pathos: "As energy, immorality is also character" (PA 78). For earnest evil at least has volitional continuity. "Character" here stands for a stable set of devotions that tend to last because they are ever-renewed in projective striving; it consists in *volitional* dispositions. As Kupperman says, character involves "loyalty to commitments and projects" and a willingness to change them only for one "own reasons."⁸⁰ Similarly, Frankfurt describes "cares" as binding past and future together for the agent because they involve "a certain consistency or steadiness" in motivation.⁸¹ If one cares about some X, the desire for X "must endure through an exercise of his own volitional activity" rather than simply by its own inertia.⁸² For caring about X involves "identifying" with one's desire for X,⁸³ and decisive identification involves "coherence and unity of purpose over time."⁸⁴ By

contrast, inauthenticity is characterized by the absence of passionate engagement and thus by narrative discontinuity. For Kierkegaard, the volitional pathos that makes character can have different grades of moral worth, but without it,

The distinction between good and evil is enervated [or blurred] by a loose, supercilious, theoretical acquaintance with evil, by an overbearing shrewdness which knows that the good is not appreciated or rewarded in the world....No one is carried away to great exploits by the good, no one is rushed into outrageous sin by evil, the one is just as good as the other, and yet for that every reason there is all the more to gossip [or bs.] about, for ambiguity and equivocation are titillating and stimulating... (PA 78)

This is the same distinction that Judge William describes in terms of two levels of "choice" in the second letter in *Either/Or* II. The aesthetic attitude fails to appreciate moral distinctions as having first-personal significance for one's life, and thus remains beneath *both* good and evil, because it lacks the categorical condition of projective will that Kierkegaard calls "pathos," "spirit," or "inwardness" (a term which implies that caring involves a relation to oneself as well as to the objects of one's care).⁸⁵ But this failure of inwardness may not originate solely in the individual. *The Present Age* emphasizes that it is sometimes partly a result of cultural pathology: prevailing social conditions can cloud the ethical distinctions that are required for projective willing to break out of aesthetic paralysis.⁸⁶ Ethical bs. or idle talk that dulls all value-contrasts without our even realizing it acts on the will like the magic harp that lulls the giant to sleep. Then even a stark encounter with genuine evil can, for all its harm, be helpful in awakening the quiescent will from its slumber.

Like Rousseau before him, Kierkegaard sees high society as playing this soporific role by creating an atmosphere of artificial politeness or decorum in which sincerity about one's views and direct expression of one's commitments is replaced by simulacra of concern. In Rousseau's analysis, society corrupts the individual by encouraging invidious comparisons that lead to "envy" as desire for relative equality, and thence to desires for domination.⁸⁷ For Kierkegaard, the problem is instead that what we might call *existential envy* blocks earnest respect for the heroism of others, which is ennobling and can ground projective motivation in the agent (PA 82). This envy is a kind of listlessness that makes one afraid to make life-decisions or commit to a concrete identity lest others mock it: "Reflection's envy holds the will and energy in a kind of captivity" (PA 81).⁸⁸ Unlike the more honest envy that at least recognizes another's superiority, this is "characterless envy" that "makes sport" of any kind of excellence to which identity-defining vocations, practices, or interpersonal relationships can aspire (PA 83-84). This is what Kierkegaard means by "leveling" (PA 84).⁸⁹ Even the passions in aestheticism that can be taken up and transformed in ethical caring are beaten down in leveling,⁹⁰ which is the opposite of ethical equality before God (PA 88). For the individual "fears more than death ... reflection's judgment upon him, reflection's objection to his wanting to venture something as an individual" (PA 85). So "Envy turns into the principle of characterlessness" (PA 83): it prevents the agent from caring in Frankfurt's sense, or gaining a self-perpetuating volitional character. Without strong value-contrasts between excellence and its opposites, or a keen sense of goods beyond our own material self-interest and pleasures, the agent's will is robbed of its basis for projective motivation. The result is shrewd or ironic detachment in place of active participation or "belonging" through one's own free endeavor:

the individual does not belong to God, to himself, to the beloved, to his art, to his scholarship; no, just as a serf belongs to an estate [involuntarily], so the individual realizes that in every respect he belongs to an abstraction in which reflection subordinates him (PA 85).

In other words, the individual becomes mere thing, possessed by a vaporous "aggregate" that can think and choose for him; only the collective can act, so there is no individual responsibility. In this special sense, "the public" is defined as the opposite of free association from earnest passion: one cannot "belong" to it as lovers belong to each other, but only let oneself be absorbed into it through an abdication of responsibility. In Heidegger's sense of *das Man*, "the public" is the anonymity in which people hide when they lack the courage for autonomy or self-rule (PA 89).

It is a mistake to infer from these comments that *all* solidarity or self-definition through group membership necessarily causes inauthenticity. Being a loner is neither necessary nor sufficient for authenticity. Authentic collective action is possible, but it requires active engagement from each participant, and that in turn requires their personal appropriation of shared goods as their own final ends -- which is always a risk. Being a (positively) "free" participant in concrete groups can "reinforce and educate the individual, yet without shaping him entirely" (PA 92). Like authentic art, this kind of existential *bildung* requires rather than suppresses individual response and initiative: each member of the group cultivates her own interpretation of its common life and benefits from the unique interpretation of others. Likewise, in religious faith, the individual is "educated to make up his own mind instead of agreeing with the public" by default. So "strong communal life" and even action by "the people" as a whole⁹¹ are possible for Kierkegaard (PA 91); he contrasts such "contemporaneity with actual persons" in joint efforts with the anonymous public that suppresses individual alterity (PA 91). Like Buber after him, Kierkegaard believes that such vital community arises from encounters in which the participants are freely present. It requires the kind of "personal human discourse" or sincere self-revelation that is blocked by bs (PA 104). It is impossible when "chatter" replaces "essential speaking" or earnest communication (PA 97).

In sum, we have a vicious circle: the leveling of excellence and ethical distinction prevents *and* is fed by lack of volitional engagement. We can also look at the "public" as the interpersonal analog of the individual aesthete. The idle talk that reigns in this faceless public is analogous to the existential bs. within an individual who resists the natural orientation of personhood towards full selfhood through personal devotion to ends that transcend her own pleasures and security.

VI. Reflexive Attitudes that Promote Authentic Caring for Outwards Ends

We have seen that Frankfurt's critiques of bs. and wantonness can be explained in the more fundamental terms of Kierkegaard's analysis of inauthenticity. His diagnosis implies a model of authenticity in terms of projective motivation that it in deep concord with Frankfurt on two points. First, it suggests that most of the goals, activities, or relationships (both dialogical and social) to which we devote ourselves when we "choose the ethical" lie literally outside us -- in the other, or in the world, though of course we can also will our own good.⁹² Frankfurt apparently agrees, since "selflessness" is a defining feature of caring on his initial account: the agent's attention's attention is focused outward on his ideal or on the person(s) he loves.⁹³ Indeed, the object of care is entrancing in a way that we find liberating, especially in the case of "volitionally necessary" cares from which we cannot choose 'at will' to disengage.⁹⁴ In another essay, Frankfurt suggests that the difference between caring and desires that are initially passive (or wanton unless we identify with them) is found in their devotion to something beyond the self as a final end. An agent's "active love" aims at goods that "are altogether distinct from and independent of his own."⁹⁵ Later he recognizes that this analysis is not quite adequate because the kind of pure motive that distinguishes care-love can also be directed at the agent's own good.⁹⁶ But "aesthetic, cultural, and religious ideals" to which people may be devoted are not egoistic, even if they are not based on moral duties;⁹⁷ in these typical cares,

the agent focused on something beyond herself. Likewise for love of children and significant others. Although discovering and articulating one's love is "inherently important" because it gives our lives shape and meaning, this existential benefit depends on our outward focus on what or who we care about: "The value of loving to the lover derives from his dedication to his beloved," or his taking her well-being as his final end.⁹⁸

Second, the cares that constitute an authentic identity have a reflexive side. Kierkegaard's emphasis on "inwardness" and Frankfurt's stress on the higher-order volitions involved in caring⁹⁹ both suggest that authenticity requires certain self-directed attitudes and efforts. These must be distinct from the sort of morose obsession with self that we typically find in various sentimental and narcissistic states, which are instead symptoms of aestheticism. The comparisons already made between themes in Frankfurt, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger suggest a way of drawing this subtle yet crucial distinction between *authenticity-enhancing* and *authenticity-reducing* reflexive attitudes or higher-order psychological states.

Some insight into this problem can be gained from another fascinating (and frustrating) but less famous essay by Frankfurt, namely his 1991 Presidential Address to the Eastern APA. There he argues that the weakest human passion is not "love of truth," as Housman wrote, but specifically "our love of the truth about ourselves."¹⁰⁰ Now, the many varieties of self-deception in human experience all indicate the difficulty of commitment to self-disclosure, or caring to know how we really are. But as Kierkegaard helped us recognize, the self-deception involved in existential bs. as a way of life, or as a way of stalling in matters that call for caring about truth-values, is especially damaging to prospects for knowing oneself. For the person who wishes to hide from the importance of truth in general -- and wishes to do this without admitting it to himself -- has a project that works against honest appraisal of all his other significant motives as well. This applies especially to projective motives or cares that would be sustained by his own will, or to his volitional character: he avoids recognizing its emptiness. The inveterate bs. artist might enter psychoanalysis, but only because that process helps distract him (despite the therapist's best intentions) from his only real devotion, which is to flow along in life without ever being halted, sobered, or humbled by truth. And Frankfurt agrees with all the sages that no truth is more humbling than that about our own character. Why else would caring about this kind of truth be the hardest passion to cultivate?

Thus the project that defines bs. as a way of life, or more broadly all voluntary wantonness, requires self-deception and a refusal to care about the truth regarding one's practical identity. In turn, this usually requires *bs.ing oneself* about oneself, i.e. telling oneself stories about one's roles and activities that are sometimes true, sometimes false, but chosen only with regard to aesthetic criteria such as how pleasing or flattering they are, or whether the *self-image* they paint fits in well with other expectations. One manages one's public persona, one's social self, in accordance with this self-image, and that *looks* like autonomy, but it's bs.: the face one shows to others is a *mask* that hides from them -- *and* from oneself -- the underlying hollowness, the absence of any resolved identity and thus the lack of deep meaning in one's life. This way, others will never force us to face our refusal to care about truth-values, or to question it. This reflexive aspect of existential bs. can nevertheless masquerade as merely instrumental bs.: if the issue is forced to the surface, the agent tells herself that her bs. is all merely a means to persuading others for their own good, not a way of evading the primordial 'choice' to become an ethical chooser. Likewise, wantonness can hide behind the appearance of sincerity in relationships. The agent feigns concern about truth as a means to fool herself: she devotes herself to honesty in communication with others, but only in order to bs. herself into believing that she is an honest interlocutor, a devoted friend, etc. -- not because she really cares

about truthfully expressing her convictions, or about forming deep convictions at all. Thus a normally healthy focus on one's own honesty or sincerity can become a mere means to existential self-distraction: we convince ourselves that we are sincere fellows, while genuine sincerity requires caring about facts and values beyond the self-image we maintain (including some that can be damaging to our self-image).¹⁰¹ There is a close analogy here with emotional sincerity, which requires genuinely feeling the emotions that are appropriate, rather than those that are convenient. Many emotions are communicative or expressive in nature, and when one doesn't care about communicating what is really worth feeling in the situation, the emotions turn into bs.

This helps explain how self-regarding attitudes can undermine authenticity, but it does not follow that authenticity requires total spontaneity without any attention to self or self-monitoring. That's another of the many romantic myths that have grown up around the concept of authenticity. Frankfurt recognizes in "The Faintest Passion" that it is vitally important to care about our true nature or identity, even though we may lack privileged access to it (and here friends can help us). Indeed, it seems that one could never escape a life of bs. or wantonness without caring to some extent about one's character, who one really is, or what one stands for. This is because volitional caring about any plausible candidate X entails caring₂ that one has this care₁ -- which may be explained in terms of these two conditions:

- (a) caring to understand one's own practical identity (or to know that self-sustained commitment to X is part of one's identity), and
- (b) caring about the worthiness of this devotion (and the resulting worth of the practical identity that it partially constitutes).

This is a plausible interpretation of Frankfurt's 1982 claims that "it is necessarily important to people what they care about" and that "if anything is worth caring about, then it must be worth caring about what to care about."¹⁰² These are among several noteworthy passages in which Frankfurt implies that care or love *can* be based on objective evaluations of their objects.¹⁰³

Thus if (a) and (b) capture the 2nd-order caring that is natural to full personhood, we have to revise Frankfurt's more recent subjectivism in light of his own earlier essays: earnestly caring about anything or anyone requires that faintest passion, i.e. caring about the truth regarding one's own projects, commitments, *and* their value -- which is at least partly a function of the intrinsic value of their objects. This revision brings Frankfurt into concord with Kierkegaard's view that willingness to face oneself as an ethical chooser, or to consider one's life-goals in light of ethical ideals, is a transcendental condition for avoiding a life of wantonness or aestheticism, since without it we cannot earnestly commit to anything or anyone. This explains why bs. in its existential form as a way of life or basic attitude is not only contrary to caring about truth-value in one's speech, but also undermines caring about *anything* for its objective value. For if caring about X implies caring about the truth concerning X and X's worth as an object of devotion, then caring about truth is a transcendental condition for the possibility of caring about anything else.

This also explains why the notion of authenticity is often explained as *being true to oneself*, or following one's "heart." This idea accurately reflects the *positive* contribution to authenticity made by certain reflexive attitudes, such as caring₂ about one's cares₁ in the way defined by (a) and (b). We have to discover what projects and endeavors we are capable of devoting ourselves to, and sometimes make choices among this feasible set. Likewise, earnest devotion to any X will involve a 2nd-order volition identifying with 1st-order desires and emotions that are required for serving X

(or at least consistent with caring about X). The reflexive attitude in this case is not "one thought too many" because it is integral to projective commitment to 1st-order ends. This avoids the mistake of defining authenticity as a self-loyalty that is achieved by the individual will alone without any objective measures of value. This is another romantic myth that has given authenticity a bad name.

As we've seen, Kierkegaard recognizes that the objective worth of final ends or excellence of activities must be the reason for devoting oneself to them: willing is a personal response to goods that are disclosed in experience, not arbitrarily posited by caring -- and in the religious stage or life-view (which develops out of the ethical for Kierkegaard), it is a response to paradoxical goods that are revealed to us, not projected by us. Kierkegaard has also helped us see that this is implied in Frankfurt's own related critiques of *bs.* and wantonness when we trace their problems to their root. But ironically, this requires rejecting Frankfurt's thesis in *The Reasons of Love* that things become important to us, or worth caring about from our perspective, only because we already care about them. On this subjectivist account, cares are not justified by the objective worth of the cared-for person, professions, goals or ideals: Frankfurt maintains that the autonomous motivation that cares provide do not depend on our judgment that the things or persons we care about have such values independently of our caring about them.¹⁰⁴ In short, Frankfurt has fallen for the romantic myth of authenticity as loyalty to one's own inscrutable heart. He imagines that there are goals or persons that one simply *must* love or care about, and that our task is only to discover this volitional destiny since without caring and loving, we cannot have a life that is robustly meaningful to us. This is not an accurate description of how cares, loves, or projective motives in general are really formed, sustained, and altered in authentic lives.

In conclusion, Frankfurt should instead have developed the key implication of his essay on *bs.*, namely that we ought to care about the truth-value of what we communicate because on significant issues, *the truth itself is among the good objectively worth caring about*. In a *Times* interview, Frankfurt seems to concede this point: he says "I had always been concerned about the importance of truth...the way in which truth is foundational to civilization and the various deformities of it that were current."¹⁰⁵ Likewise, *bs.* is harmful to self and society because it refuses to care about something that we all ought to care about. In Frankfurt's own words:

indifference to truth is extremely dangerous. The conduct of civilized life, and the vitality of the institutions that are indispensable to it, depend very fundamentally on respect for the distinction between the true and the false. Insofar as the authority of this distinction is undermined by the prevalence of bullshit and by the mindlessly frivolous attitude that accepts the proliferation of bullshit as innocuous, an indispensable human treasure is lost.¹⁰⁶

This is bracing stuff, like Kierkegaard's critique of "idle talk" and Heidegger's remarks on "the They." But the connection between Frankfurt and the existential thinkers we've explored suggests a further step: authenticity not only requires caring about truth as intrinsically valuable; it requires caring about the objective worth of our 1st-order cares, identity-defining commitments, and projects (which in turn involves the intrinsic value of their final ends). So authenticity is not *entirely* reducible to self-regarding attitudes: it is impossible for the total skeptic about intrinsic values in the world outside his agency. Such a skeptic's "heart" is necessarily empty, without any content to which he could be loyal. Since authenticity requires devoting ourselves to goods beyond our material interests, our self-development, even our own experience of meaning, an authentic agent must believe that such goods exist. Perhaps belief that such goods have ultimate significance, or are

not ultimately meaningless or figments of our imagination requires religious faith. But that is a topic for another essay.

Endnotes

¹See Edward Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation* (SUNY Press, 1991), p.99, and *Selves in Discord and Resolve* (Routledge, 1996), pp.66-67. Mooney is also one of the first explain the error of readings Kierkegaard as an irrationalist (Ibid, pp.7-9).

²See Davenport, "The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical," *Southwest Philosophy Review* 11 no.2 (August, 1995): 73-108; revised and reprinted in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 2001): 75-112.

³See Davenport, "The Ethical and Religious Significance of Taciturnus's Letter in Kierkegaard's *Stages on Life's Way*," in the *International Kierkegaard Commentary 11: Stages on Life's Way*, ed. Robert Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, November 2000): 213-44; and "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre," new in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*: 265-324.

⁴See Davenport, "Entangled Freedom: Ethical Authority, Original Sin, and Choice in Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*," *Kierkegaardiana* 21 (2001): 131-51; and "Kierkegaard, Anxiety, and the Will," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, Vol. 6, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and Jon Stewart (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, fall 2001): 158-81.

⁵See Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton University Press, 2004), pp..... This book is a much longer version of an essay titled "On Caring" that was first published in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge University Press, 1999): 155-80, see esp. p.172.

⁶See Davenport, *Will as Commitment and Resolve: An Existential Account of Creativity, Love, Virtue, and Happiness* (Fordham University Press, June 2007), ch. 14.

⁷Frankfurt's essay "On Bullshit" was originally published in *Raritan* 6 (1986), abridged in *Harpers* (Feb. 1987), and reprinted in his collection, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge University Press, 1988): 117-133. Recently it was reprinted as a small book, *On Bullshit* (Princeton University Press, 2005). As far as I can tell, Frankfurt made no modifications for the book version, probably because he did not expect its huge popularity. I cite the book version by parenthetical page references.

⁸Frankfurt offers different explanations of the phenomenon of volitional "identification" with motives in "Freedom of the will and the concept of a person," "Identification and externality," and "Identification and wholeheartedness," all reprinted in *The Importance of What We Care About*, and later in his Presidential Address to the APA titled "The Faintest Passion," reprinted in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge University Press, 1999): 95-107.

⁹See Frankfurt, "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love," in *Vernunftbegriffe in der Moderne*: Stuttgarter Hegel Kongress, 1993, ed. Hans Friedrich Fulda and Rolf-Peter Horstmann (Klett-Cotta, 1994): 433-47; reprinted in *Necessity, Volition, and Love*: 129-41. I borrow the term "erosiac" from Alan Soble's work on love; see the full explanation in Davenport, *Will as Commitment and Resolve*, ch. 4.

¹⁰See especially the knight of infinite resignation in Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, tr. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1984).

¹¹This famous essay has often been reprinted on its own; thus I will italicize its title as if it were a distinct book. In fact, it is the last section of *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age: A Literary*

Review, tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1978): Part III, §2, 68-112. The Princeton title itself is a simplification of the work's more complex original title: *A Literary Review: Two Ages, a Novel by the Author of "A Story of Everyday Life," edited by J. L. Heiberg*. In other words, Kierkegaard takes this novel by Gyllembourg as the basis for his contrast between the two ages, although the novel will not be relevant in my discussion of *The Present Age*.

¹²This essay is a long subsection in one of three edifying discourses titled "An Occasional Discourse" within the part titled "On the Occasion of a Confession," in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1993): 24-153. Since it is also often referred to as if it were a distinct book, I will italicize its title.

¹³I mean 'spirit' here in the sense of *geist* or will (or Plato's middle part of the soul), much as Kierkegaard's *Anti-Climacus* uses the term in *Sickness Unto Death*, rather than to imply a mental substance in a dualist conception of mind. So I could have called the underlying ailment 'pneumatological,' or (following Viktor Frankl) a "noögenic neurosis" --but these terms are more obscure.

¹⁴Like autonomy, authenticity may also be applied to groups, for example when claiming that a certain group is an authentic "people" rather than a miscellaneous hodgepodge or arbitrarily assembled set. So it is important at times to distinguish between personal and group authenticity, though I only discuss the former in this essay.

¹⁵See the discussion in "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics," p.294, p.296, and note 99.

¹⁶ For example, in *The Sources of Normativity*, Christine Korsgaard discusses what she calls our "practical identity," though she includes in it group memberships, roles, and relationships with which a person might not identify wholly or at all (p.101).

¹⁷See Joel Kupperman, *Character* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p.13, p.43, p.47: "character is our style of thought and action in matters of importance." This work is influenced by both Frankfurt and Kierkegaard.

¹⁸See Thaddeus Metz, "Recent Work on the Meaning of Life,"

¹⁹Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p.23, pp.51-52, p.58.

²⁰Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," in J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, eds., *Utilitarianism: for and against* (Cambridge University Press, 1973): 77-150, pp.110-16. Like Frankfurt on "cares," Williams suggests that agents are "identified" in a distinctive way with their "commitments," which involve something more than mere desires or "tastes." Yet the Humeanism that emerges in his later essays leaves Williams no adequate way to explain their volitional "seriousness" or "depth" in one's life.

²¹Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," reprinted in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge University Press, 1981, pb 1985): 20-39, pp.11-13. He also refers to such motives as "categorical desires."

²²See Jeffrey Blustein, *Care and Commitment* (Oxford University Press, 1991).

²³See Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, pp.100-2.....

²⁴According to Bob Thompson, *Washington Post*, July 28, 2005 (p.C01) the book had sold 250,000 copies then; see online story. Princeton University Press confirmed that as of June 2006, the book had sold 400,000. I do not have sales figures since then, but it is likely to have reached ½ million copies by now.

²⁵See Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* Part I, tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1987): 301-445.

²⁶Despite the fact that Frankfurt thought "On Bullshit" important enough to include with other serious works on free will, responsibility, and motivation in his collection, *The Importance of What We Care About*.

²⁷G.A. Cohen, "Deeper into Bullshit," in *Contours of Agency*, ed. Buss and Overton (MIT Press, 2002): 321-39.

²⁸Ibid, p.330.

²⁹Ibid, p.329.

³⁰Ibid, p.328.

³¹For example, consider Alan Sokal's famous and invaluable hoax article, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," *Social Text* #46/47 (spring/summer 1996): 217-252. This essay is a parody of extreme antirealism and antilogic in some types of continental philosophy, though *Social Text* published it without realizing that the essay was entirely bs.

³²We might require more connection between the proximate and ultimate goals when the latter concern the truth or falsity of beliefs. For instance, it is hard to see how someone could qualify as using bs. as a means to bring about true or warranted belief as a final end: if that really among his final ends in the speech-act, then he is not really bs.-ing in Frankfurt's sense. Likewise if his ultimate goal is the odd one of bringing about false or unwarranted belief.

³³Frankfurt, "Reply to G.A. Cohen," in *Contours of Agency*: 340-44, p.341.

³⁴Frankfurt, "Reply to G.A. Cohen," p.340.

³⁵Ibid, p.343.

³⁶When the agent does not intend to communicate truth or falsehood as an essential part of her goal in communicating, this is usually either (i) because the context does not call for such concern, or allows for benign chatter; or (ii) because the agent *herself* does not care about the truth-status of the ideas she is expressing. For, a person who cares about the truth-value of the ideas that she is communicating normally also cares about the truth-value of the beliefs that her interlocutors acquire from her communication to them. This connection is clearest when the agent cares about the truth of (or warrant for) his own beliefs as a *final end* (and I will return to this point below).

³⁷Cohen sees this, but does not supply the answer. Instead, he moves to a discussion of nonsense in the content of communicative acts, which is interesting, but not for my present purposes.

³⁸See Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," reprinted in Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*: 11-25, p.16.

³⁹Although it has not, to my knowledge, received attention in the large secondary literature on Frankfurt's ideas concerning personal autonomy. Connections have now been made in a few of the essays in *Bullshit and Philosophy*, ed. Gary Hardcastle and George Reisch (Open Court, 2006).

⁴⁰ Although a bs.er could care about other values and bs. for the sake of them. These are cases of common instrumental bs., which does not indicate the deeper attitude or project that I call existential bs.

⁴¹Ronald de Sousa, "The Rationality of Emotions," in *Explaining Emotions*, ed. Amélie O. Rorty (University of California Press, 1980): 127-52, pp.128-30 [the variables are my addition]. Also see the later version in de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotions* (MIT Press, 1987, pb. 1990), pp.158-61.

⁴²Ibid, p.130, and *The Rationality of Emotions*, p.160.

⁴³Ibid, pp.132-34, and *The Rationality of Emotions*, pp.159-62. Thus there is a kind of "intrinsic rationality" in all emotions because it is constitutive of them to aim at a type of axiological rightness, even when they are wildly inappropriate. Though its standard is difficult to analyze, de Sousa thinks it is found in the biological function of emotions, just as Fred Dretske thinks that what certain signs indicate is determined by biology (while the referent of other indicators is fixed by only by convention).

⁴⁴In "Freedom of the will and the concept of a person," Frankfurt first describes 2nd-order volitions as expressions of "reflective self-evaluation" (p.12) and says that such critical awareness involves rational capacities (p.17); but he then adds that 2nd-order volitions need not express any practical evaluation of 1st-order desires and may be mere preferences (p.19, note 6). This anticipates his later claims that cares need not be based on rational evaluation of its object. However, Frankfurt says that his concept of personhood is "the concept of a type of entity for whom the freedom of its will may be a problem" (p.19) which sounds like a constitutive condition involving a telos. For Frankfurt, its implicit standard turns out to be *only* a reflexive coherence through wholeheartedness.

⁴⁵Ibid, pp.18-19.

⁴⁶Ibid, p.16. The ambiguity is clearest when Frankfurt writes that "the wanton addict *cannot or does not* care which of his conflicting first-order desires wins out" (p.18, my italics).

⁴⁷Ibid, pp.17-18 and pp.24-25 (where the willing addict comes in).

⁴⁸At least in Peter Jackson film version of *The Fellowship of the Ring*; in Tolkien's book, in fact Pippin and Merry care deeply about Frodo from the start and are part of a secret plan to keep track of him and ensure that he has support. It is the largely concerns of the world and the war with Sauron that they come to care about later on.

⁴⁹ It should be noted that most of the so-called "informal fallacies" that are not technically invalid inferences in sentential or predicate logic, such as begging the question or refusing the burden of proof, are fallacies precisely because they violate dialectical expectations that are implicit in the shared assumption that the communicative exchange aims at truth or better-warranted belief as its primary final end.

⁵⁰More precisely, where the context and illocutionary mode of her speech-act involves an apparent validity-claim, and thus ordinarily requires some good-faith effort to communicate what he believes honestly, this bs.er deliberately *refuses* to care about whether the content of what she says tracks what she regards as the truth (directly or inversely) of the matter at hand.

⁵¹Jonathan Lear, "Whatever," *The New Republic* (March 21, 2005): 23-25.

⁵²In *On Bullshit*, Frankfurt notes the connection between the rise of bs. and skepticism about the possibility of "any reliable access to objective reality" (p.64).

⁵³Harry Frankfurt, *On Truth* (Alfred Knopf, 2006), pp.7-9. Yet unfortunately, in this sequel to *On Bullshit*, Frankfurt focuses almost entirely on the instrumental values of truth-telling or honesty and so emphasizes the social harms that result from bs. when widely used as a mere means to all sorts of other ends (p.4, p.6, pp.15-17). He says little about the intrinsic value of truth or the reflexive harm that the bs.er does to *herself* by weakening the grasp on normative truth that is necessary for establishing a meaningful identity. Though he clearly does think that we need truth to "understand how to live well" (p.36), his own subjectivism about values worth caring about prevents him from offering any strong challenge to emotivist and postmodernist suspicions that normative or evaluative judgments have no objective truth-value (pp.28-29). He is limited to asserting that *nonnormative* factual knowledge is important for forming commitments and for "validating the purposes and goals that we choose and that we set ourselves to pursue" as instrumentally rational (p.31). For he agrees with those who think that choice of *final* ends cannot "be justified rationally at all" (p.31).

⁵⁴For a harrowing example of such a character taken to an extreme (in the religious fantasy world of the newly dead), see Charles Williams's description of Evelyn in *All Hallows Eve* (Pellegrini & Cudahy; 1948; reprinted by Eerdmans, 1981).

⁵⁵See "The Immediate Stages of the Erotic" in *Either/Or I*: 45-135, esp. p.85, where Don Giovanni/Don Juan is described as pure desire for a particular object, and compared to music as pure flow. Don Juan is an ideal type of the sensual without even the psychic components of the erotic; he represents maximal immediacy, the "spirit of flesh" incarnate (p.88).

⁵⁶These aesthetes are all bs.ers of different sorts: those who live only for pleasure or material reward are like the Greek sophist who seeks to persuade his audience by any rhetorical device as a means to other political ends. The reflective aesthetes, by contrast, are not merely instrumental bs.ers; they lose themselves reflection in order to avoid the moral seriousness of weighty life-choices and commitments.

⁵⁷See *Either/Or I*, pp.....

⁵⁸ See "The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical," *op. cit.*, and Davenport, "Entangled Freedom: Ethical Authority, Original Sin, and Choice in Kierkegaard's Concept of Anxiety," *Kierkegaardiana* 21 (2001): 131-51.

⁵⁹Kierkegaard, "The Seducer's Diary," in *Either/Or Vol.I*, tr. Hong and Hong (Princeton University Press, 1987). For example, he says, "Plainly and simply to deceive a girl, for that I would not have the stamina" (p.437). Rather, his only devotion is to his aesthetic ideal of making each moment interesting.

⁶⁰The thesis that emotions are naturally for their own sake, or for the sake of *appropriateness* in response to the world and others in it, requires a detailed defense. I have begun this task in "The Binding Value of Earnest Emotional Valuation," *International Journal of Decision Ethics* 2 no.1 (Fall 2006): 107-23.

⁶¹"The Seducer's Diary," p.424: "How interesting she is in this profound passionateness...!"

⁶²Ibid, p.438. Of course this means that he does not meet the categorical condition for real emotions; he experiences only their simulacra. In this sense, his project is self-defeating.

⁶³Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, pp.53-55.

⁶⁴Ibid, p.16.

⁶⁵Ibid, pp.6-7. However, I would not grant Frankfurt's additional claim that "persons who are scrupulously moral" could be this hollow (p.6); for moral motivation requires cares that are incompatible with wantonness. The truth in his observation comes from the fact that there is a rich array of nonmoral ends worth caring about, and a full life requires significant attention to them as well. But this truth is not compatible with Frankfurt's subjectivist denial that caring is based on rational grounds.

⁶⁶Gabrielle Taylor, "Deadly Vices?" in *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford University Press, 1998): 157-72, p.161.

⁶⁷Ibid, p.163.

⁶⁸Ibid, pp.165-66.

⁶⁹Ibid, p.168. As Taylor says, in this state, "since her commitment to whatever she is doing is merely a shallow one, it will not generate reasons for embarking on a coherent, life-guiding plan of action" (Ibid, p.169).

⁷⁰Frankfurt, "Reply to G.A. Cohen," p.343.

⁷¹As described here, existential bs. obviously has important similarities to Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of "bad faith." But it requires a detailed analysis to make clear how the notion of higher-order will is implicit in Sartre's notion of "transcendence" and to explain how self-deception is involved in the various different types of bad faith. At any rate, while Frankfurt has critiqued Sartre's account of radical choice, he says nothing about the close relation between bs. and Sartrean bad faith.

⁷²Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. Macquarrie and Robinson (Harper and Row, 1962), Division One, V ¶35, H168, p.212.

⁷³This well-known debt will be explored in connection with the notion of narrative unity as essential to full selfhood another essay on Kierkegaard that I'm preparing for a collection on *Kierkegaard and Death*.

⁷⁴Ibid, H169, p. 213. So it seems that Heidegger scooped Frankfurt on this point. Heidegger's analysis of "idle talk" is also heavily indebted to Kierkegaard's critique of speculative philosophy that attempts to replace religious faith, especially as stated by the pseudonym Climacus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid, H170, p.214.

⁷⁷Of course, Kierkegaard knew little about what was transpiring in America during his lifetime.

⁷⁸In Cheshire Calhoun's sense: see "Standing for Something," *The Journal of Philosophy* 92 no.5 (May 1995): 235-60.

⁷⁹Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Nobel Prize Lecture*, tr. Nicholas Bethel (London: Stenvalley Press, 1973), p.55.

⁸⁰Kupperman, *Character*, p.14.

⁸¹Frankfurt, "The importance of what we care about," pp.83-84.

⁸²Frankfurt, "On Caring," p.160.

⁸³Ibid, p.161. In at least ten passages, Frankfurt either directly links caring and volitional identification or describes them in parallel terms. Yet after returning to a weaker structural or synchronic conception of identification in terms of "satisfaction" in "The Faintest Passion," he concluded that caring did not require identification or the converse: see his "Reply to Gary Watson" in *Contours of Agency*, p.161. This attempt to divorce identification and caring introduces confusion and contradicts his earlier insights; Frankfurt should instead have taken this implication as a *reductio* of the satisfaction analysis of identification.

⁸⁴Frankfurt, "Identification and wholeheartedness," in *The Importance of What We Care About*, p.175.

⁸⁵As Kierkegaard says in discussing four examples, the agent "does not relate himself in the relation but is a spectator" (PA 79).

⁸⁶On this feedback relation, see the last section of Davenport, "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics."

⁸⁷See Rousseau, "Discourse on Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men," in *The Basic Political Writings*, tr. Donald Cress (Hackett Publishing, 1987): 25-82, Part Two, pp.64-68.

⁸⁸Unlike the Judge, Kierkegaard suggests that the individual has to make two movements to escape from aestheticism: he must "break out of the prison in which his own reflection holds him" and then break out of the *sittlichkeit* of his associates, which requires "religious inwardness" (PA 81). This prison within a prison metaphor is good illustration of how Kierkegaard preserves Judge William's insights but nests them within the higher religious standpoint.

⁸⁹Thus what Kierkegaard means by "leveling" is not redistribution for material equality, but rather *existential leveling* in which strong evaluative judgment in Charles Taylor's sense is undermined or short-circuited. Also see p.96 on the contrast with religious equality.

⁹⁰As Norman Lillegaard argues, some of Kierkegaard's aesthetes do have passions that provide constancy in their lives, which could become the basis for their ethical transformation. For example, "Claudine" in the novel *Two Ages* is faithful in erotic love, although her passion remains immediate or unchosen; she does not make the "effort" to integrate the desires given to her by "nature and history" in a rational "self-concept;" see Lillegaard, "Thinking with Kierkegaard and MacIntyre about Virtue," in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre* 211-32, pp.213-14. What Lillegaard means by "effort" here is what I call projective motivation, and the idea that it requires a "life-view" corresponds to the claim that volitional commitment is a response to perceived values as grounds.

⁹¹An example of this kind of authentic collective action in which everyone had to act together yet everyone had individual responsibility for his own acts and for "what was done by individuals in their midst" (PA 91) might be the allied effort of British, French, Canadian, Russian, and American peoples to overcome the Nazis in World War II. Despite crimes committed by individual soldiers, there can be no doubt that passing through this crucible had an upbuilding effect on most of the allies involved and fostered stronger communal ties both domestically and internationally. Like the ideals of the revolutionary age in the 18th century, it gave people a moral compass.

⁹²See the discussion of proper self-love in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*.

⁹³Frankfurt, "The importance of what we care about," reprinted in *The Importance of What We Care About*: 80-94, p.89.

⁹⁴Ibid, p.88

⁹⁵Frankfurt, "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love," in *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, p.134.

⁹⁶Frankfurt, "On Caring," p.168. Yet then the distinction between caring and mere desires or inclinations drawn in "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love" breaks down, for presumably every motive aims at some final end. The solution is to distinguish (a) erosiac desires that arise passively from attraction towards goods apparently connected with the agent's material well-being and (b) non-erosiac motives that actively project final ends independently of any prior attraction to them. Such projective motives need not be "selfless" since they can aim at goods related to oneself, but they are not passively caused by the attractive pull of such goods (given our general attraction to our happiness). Frankfurt's confusion about this distinction is evident when he counts the instinctual desire to stay alive as an instance of love (*Reasons of Love*, p.27 and pp.40-41) despite his repeated effort to distinguish care-love from "attraction," affect, passive appetites in general (e.g. *Reasons of Love*, pp.42-43).

⁹⁷Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love*, p.8.

⁹⁸Ibid, p.59.

⁹⁹But see note 83 above.

¹⁰⁰See Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," reprinted in Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition, and Love*: 95-107, p.95. That this talk is connected with the essay on bs. is evident from the detailed discussion of lying near its beginning (pp.96-97).

¹⁰¹ In this very restricted sense, Frankfurt might be right in his final claim that "sincerity itself is bullshit" (p.67). But in this final bit of levity, Frankfurt may also be confusing sincerity with authenticity, or being true to oneself.

¹⁰²Frankfurt, "The importance of what we care about," in *The Importance of What We Care About*, p.92.

¹⁰³Though he never says that all caring *must* be based on some putatively objective value in the object or in the process of caring itself.

¹⁰⁴See Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁵Peter Edidin, *The New York Times*, Feb. 14, 2005; www.nytimes.com/2005/02/14/books/14bull.html

¹⁰⁶Frankfurt, "Reply to G.A. Cohen," p.343.