

REASON AND FAITH IN KIERKEGAARD'S AUTHORSHIP

REASON AND FAITH IN KIERKEGAARD'S AUTHORSHIP

By

Michael B. Root, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

(c) Copyright by Michael Bennett Root, September 1990

MASTER OF ARTS (1990)  
(Religious Studies)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Reason and Faith in Kierkegaard's Authorship

AUTHOR: Michael Bennett, Root, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISORS: Dr. Louis Greenspan

Dr. John C. Robertson

Dr. Ben F. Meyer

NUMBER OF PAGES: viii, 224

## ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with Soren Kierkegaard's understanding of reason and faith. Whereas the reader may be unfamiliar with his works, I have elected to begin my discussion with an introduction to their authorship.

Bringing knowledge of the authorship to bear on the question at hand, I aim to elucidate the respective viewpoints of three of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors, namely: Johannes de Silentio, Johannes Climacus and Johannes Anti-Climacus.

Summarizing these three presentations finally with reference to the major autographic works, including his Journals and Papers, I aim to clarify Kierkegaard's point of view and understanding respecting the nature of reason and faith and their relation in a Christian's life.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks, first of all, to Dr. Louis Greenspan, whose willingness to oversee my work with the acumen of an experienced thinker contributed greatly to whatever lucidity is apparent in this presentation. I would also like to acknowledge the quiet but tangible support of Dr. John C. Robertson Jr., Dr. Ben F. Meyer, Dr. Gerard Vallée, Dr. Julia Watkin, Dr. Ian G. Weeks and Dr. Travis Kroeker, without whose encouragement I likely would not have completed this.

Of course, my thanks go to the Department of Graduate Affairs for the opportunity of studying for one year in Tuebingen. Among other boons, that time afforded me the opportunity to read and reflect upon many of Kierkegaard's lesser known works.

I reserve special thanks for the Reverend Edgar Toompuu, from whom I first heard Kierkegaard's name, and who invited heretics' questions as legitimate.

My parents, family and friends receive my greatest appreciation for whatever intimations of faith they have shared with me.

"Pascal declares: 'One ought to have these three qualities: Pyrrhonist, geometrician, and a Christian submitting in faith. And these three stand in harmony with each other and temper each other, inasmuch as one doubts when one should, affirms when one should, and submits when one should. The last act of reason is to acknowledge that there are many things which exceed its powers; if reason does not reach this point, it is merely weak.'"

-S. Kierkegaard

"*Submission.* We must know when to doubt, when to feel certain and when to submit. Anyone who does otherwise does not understand the power of reason. There are some who break these three rules, either by assuring us that everything can be proved because they understand nothing about the nature of proof; or by doubting everything because they do not know when it is necessary to submit; or by submitting in everything because they do not know when we must use our judgement. Sceptic, mathematician, Christian; doubt, certainty, submission."

-B. Pascal

"If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied."

-Paul of Tarsus

## ABBREVIATIONS

All references to the works of Kierkegaard will appear in the body of the thesis using the following abbreviations:

AC.....	<u>Attack Upon 'Christendom'</u>
BA.....	<u>The Book on Adler</u>
CA.....	<u>The Concept of Anxiety</u>
CP.....	<u>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</u>
CD.....	<u>Christian Discourses Etc.</u>
ED.....	<u>Edifying Discourses</u>
EO v. I.....	<u>Either / Or volume I</u>
EO v. II.....	<u>Either / Or volume II</u>
FT.....	<u>Fear and Trembling</u>
GS.....	<u>Gospel of Sufferings</u>
JC.....	<u>Johannes Climacus</u>
JP.....	<u>Journals and Papers</u>
JY.....	<u>Judge For Yourself!</u>
MA.....	<u>My Activity as A Writer</u>
PF.....	<u>Philosophical Fragments</u>
PH.....	<u>Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing</u>
PV.....	<u>The Point of View For My Work as An Author: A Report to History</u>
R.....	<u>Repetition</u>
SD.....	<u>The Sickness Unto Death</u>
SE.....	<u>For Self-Examination</u>

SL.....Stages on Life's Way

TC.....Training in Christianity

TD.....Thoughts on Crucial Situations in Human  
Life: Three Discourses on Imagined  
Occasions in Human Life

WL.....Works of Love

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE	Kierkegaard's Authorship	1
PREFACE TO CHAPTER TWO		56
CHAPTER TWO	Reason and Faith in the Authorship	57
	I Johannes de Silentio	59
	II Johannes Climacus	85
	III Johannes Anti-Climacus	145
	IV Comparison of the Pseudonyms' Views and Kierkegaard's Understanding	178
BIBLIOGRAPHY		223

## CHAPTER ONE: KIERKEGAARD'S AUTHORSHIP

When one considers Kierkegaard's works -- the many pseudonyms: authors, editors, publishers and narrative characters; the diverse styles: aphorism, essay, diary, letter, sermon, discourse, narrative, review and treatise -- one begins to question the nature and purpose of this complex accomplishment. Happily, the reader is not left entirely to her own devices in the face of this formidable literature, for, among his posthumous papers, Kierkegaard left the manuscript of a book entitled The Point of View for My Work as An Author: A Report to History.<sup>1</sup>

This book clearly demonstrates his concern that the nature of his work not finally be misunderstood. Together with two similar accountings, which were published during his lifetime,<sup>2</sup> it provides helpful insight into the author's mind as he reflected upon his work up to that point. In it, he addresses the following two related questions: first, did he possess a complete, programmatic vision of his work

---

<sup>1</sup> Written in 1848, the book was not published until 1859, by his brother, Peter Christian Kierkegaard.

<sup>2</sup> *A First and Last Declaration* was appended to the Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments (published 1846); My Activity As A Writer -- an abridgement of The Point of View -- appeared in 1851.

from the outset? Second, how should the reader understand the relation between the two movements of his authorship? For the reader who is unacquainted with this differentiation in the authorship, I note here simply that the first of these movements comprises Kierkegaard's pseudonymous treatment of esthetics, ethics and religion; the second comprises the body of his autographic religious writings. The answer to this question is essential to a correct understanding of the particular books. We shall return to this discussion presently.

We may begin to answer the first question with reference to his Journals and Papers. For here we find Kierkegaard wrestling with his sense of responsibility for the entire productivity.

*For I am a genius of such a kind that I cannot just directly and personally assume the whole [literary production] without encroaching on Governance. ...[I]t is my genius that lets me see clearly, afterwards, the infinite 'why' in the whole, but this is Governance's doing. ...Suddenly to want to assume this enormous productivity as one single thought is too much -- although I see very well that it is that. Yet I do not believe that I was motivated by vanity. It is originally a religious thought -- I intended to attribute it to God (JP, #6388).*

We can see that he did not desire to deny the role of God in his work. This explains why responsibility for the whole constituted for him a serious question, right to the end of his life. Of course, from this expression of deference to Governance, we should not infer that Kierkegaard intended to deny his own, autonomous and

responsible role in the writing. If this were his meaning, then the question of the nature of the authorial relation between himself and his pseudonyms would be superfluous.

*On the other hand, I am not a religious person of such a kind that I can directly assign everything to God. ...No, I am a poet. My writing is essentially my own development; just as juice is pressed from fruit, Governance time and again and in a wonderful way has pressed me into a necessary situation precisely in order to make me as productive as I should be (JP, #6388, #6390).*

That he stood as author of all the explicitly edifying, religious literature, indicates that he was willing to bear responsibility for it. Concerning his pseudonymous production up to and including the Postscript, he states in his *Declaration* at the end of that book:

In a juridical and a literary sense the responsibility [for the pseudonymous works up to this point] is mine; ...In a juridical and literary sense, I say, for all poetic production would *eo ipso* be rendered impossible and unendurable if the lines must be the words of the producer, literally understood.

On the one hand, then, Kierkegaard understood his work from the beginning to have had a personal religious motivation. On the other hand, he attributed to Governance the overarching religious vision of the authorship, for he saw it himself only retrospectively. Once we consider the



authorship in connection with his personal life, this question will make more sense.<sup>1</sup>

Here we should note that too much can be made of this connection, and often has been. But to discount it entirely would be to ignore the evidence for it, including Kierkegaard's own admissions.<sup>2</sup>

Concerning his side of the effort, it is appropriate to recognize, both reflected in and shaping the works, his particular interests respecting both his personal life and

---

<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard's expression of the question of personal and divine responsibility for the coherence of the authorship and, thus, in a sense for the authorship as a whole, may seem very peculiar to the reader. We must bear in mind that Kierkegaard was a pious man, whose conception of human freedom did not entail the denial of miracles. In other words, he believed that he could very well have been used as an instrument of God, without having been aware of it at the first. Of course, when taken alongside of his refusal to any claim of working with divine authority, his belief reflects modesty and honest integrity on his part -- not false humility or blasphemy. "I am not an apostle who brings something from God, and with authority. No, I serve God, but without authority" (JP, #6936).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, JP, #6388: "I cannot assume [the authorship] personally in this way. It is true, for example, that when I began as an author I was 'religiously resolved,' but this must be understood in another way. *Either/Or*, especially 'The Seducer's Diary,' was written for [Regina's] sake, in order to clear her out of the relationship. On the whole, the very mark of my genius is that Governance broadens and radicalizes whatever concerns me personally. I remember what a pseudonymous writer said about Socrates: '...his whole life was personal preoccupation with himself, and then Governance comes and adds world-historical significance to it.' To take another example -- I am polemical by nature, and I understood the concept of 'that single individual' early. However, when I wrote it for the first time, I was thinking particularly of my reader, for this book contained a little hint to her, and until later it was for me very true personally that I sought only one single reader. Gradually this thought was taken over. But here again Governance's part is so infinite."

his desire to present his contemporaries with a programmatic, awakening literature. Concerning Governance's side, Kierkegaard's frequent expressions of grateful wonder at the coherent depth plumbed by the authorship as a whole are perhaps the most suitable and convincing testament to whatever divine end transcended him in his work. Apart from quoting him on the matter, it is difficult to say anything more specific about Governance's role through the authorship's unfolding.

So, we have answered the first of our questions. The question remains: how to make sense of the difference between those works in which Kierkegaard autographically reflects upon both Christianity and the authorship, and those which are pseudonymous? This question is significant, for, among other things, it pertains to our analysis of the discussion of the relation between reason and faith, which the authorship provides.

To answer this question, we must consult the works themselves in conjunction with excerpts from his Journals

and Papers.<sup>1</sup> We shall focus our investigation upon the proposed object of his communication, that is: the programmatic edification of his sympathetic readers, in a direction away from speculative extravagance, esthetical distraction and ethical idolatry, towards essential Christian living. We shall see that the overarching idea of the authorship is served by each of the books' comprising a step in the direction of Christian edification.

Explicit to the prefaces of his various series of Edifying Discourses,<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard's insistent hope, that each discourse would find "that individual whom I with joy

---

<sup>1</sup> In the Journals we find many helpful guides to speed our study of the authorship as, for example: "An understanding of the totality of my work as an author, its maieutic purpose, etc. requires also an understanding of my personal existence as an author, what I *qua* author have done with my personal existence to support it, illuminate it, conceal it, give it direction, etc., something which is more complicated than and just as interesting as the whole literary activity. Ideally the whole thing goes back to 'the single individual,' who is not I in an empirical sense but is the author. That Socrates belonged together with what he taught, that his teaching ended in him, that he himself was his teaching, in the setting of actuality was himself artistically a product of that which he taught -- we have learned to rattle this off by rote but have scarcely understood it" (JP, #6360).

<sup>2</sup> The first of these Discourses appeared the same year as Either / Or (1843). Sixteen more followed, either accompanying the publication of later pseudonymous books, or appearing separately, but always designating him as author. We must recognize that these works are not formally normative for the entire authorship. First, they were published autographically, whereas his more popular books from the same period (*i.e.*, from February, 1843, to February, 1846) were presented under pseudonyms: editors, authors and book binders. Second, their expressed intent -- to be read for edification -- was not the explicit aim of the major pseudonymous books.

and gratitude call *my* reader" -- whose appropriation of whatever edification lay in the work would justify its existence -- reveals the red thread of intention woven throughout the entire production, namely: edification through appropriation.

From our first note on page four, we should recall that his concern to present Christianity -- presenting it as much as a task as a doctrine -- was not identical with an apostle's concern.<sup>1</sup> Repeatedly, he insisted that he wrote only as a penitent and as a poet.

And what can I offer? I am a poet -- alas, only a poet. But I can present Christianity in the glory of its ideality; and that I have done. ...The significance of the whole authorship is its *calling attention* to the essentially Christian. Attention is not to be called to me, and yet it is to existence as a person that attention is to be called, or to the crucial significance of existence as a person for the essentially Christian. Therefore, my existence as a person is also utilized, but always in order to point beyond me at the decisive moment: I am not that. To call attention in this way is to place the essentially Christian in the relationship of possibility to men, to show them how far we are from being Christian (JP, #6727, #6525).

His motivation to clarify the distinctions between various pagan views of life, which he perceived many persons

---

<sup>1</sup> "The reason I have always spoken of myself as being without authority is that I personally have felt that there was too much of the poetic in me, furthermore that I feel aided by something higher, and also that I am put together backwards, but then, too, because I perceive the profound suffering of my life and also my guilt make me need an enormous measure of Christianity, while at the same time I am fearful of making it too heavy for someone who may not need so great a measure. Of course, neither the God-man [the Christ] nor an apostle can have such a concern -- but then I am just a poor human being" (JP, #6587 [brackets mine]).

living in geographical Christendom maintained, and the Christian view, lay primarily in his concern for honesty. His concern for honesty kept him vigilant against claiming authority where he had none. "Basically people would rather have a fanatic who says that he himself is the ideal than one who honestly strives, who humbly does not call himself more than a poet..." (JP, #6527). Similarly, where he had authority in what he was talking about, he did not often withhold his insights.

By virtue of his familiarity with the interests of his contemporaries, in the spheres of persons interested in esthetics and speculation he was easily able to capture attention with his pseudonymous literature. This superficial camaraderie he sought to turn against them in a special way. For he felt that he was working in a sort of divine secret service, according to whose charter his task was to dispel the notion that essential Christianity was

compatible with sophisticated intellectual pursuits, refined estheticism and/or self-confident moralizing.<sup>1</sup>

What I have said to myself about myself is true -- I am a kind of secret agent in the highest service. ...Wherever there is a movement that I feel is dangerous to Christianity, there I go. I do not say a word to those present, God forbid, not a word about myself -- that would be disrespectful (JP, #6192, #6727).

In a note at the beginning of the third part of his Christian Discourses, he states: "Christianity is aggressive; in Christendom, as a matter of course, it attacks from behind." Thus, his pseudonymous flirtation with the esthetes and intellectuals of nineteenth century Denmark constituted the first movement of his subversive attack, against his contemporaries, on behalf of the claims of Christianity. Kierkegaard recognized his homeland, Denmark, to be his field of operations.

So far removed, so distant is Christendom (Protestantism, especially in Denmark) from the Christianity of the New Testament that I continually must emphasize that I do not

---

<sup>1</sup> Here too, Kierkegaard does not fail to point out his penitent standpoint. "The police use secret agents too. It is not always just the men with the best and purest lives who are selected for this, quite the reverse; the police use the ingenuity of cunning, wily criminals, at the same time forcing them with the consciousness of [their former deeds]. Alas, God uses sinners in the same way. But the police do not think of reforming their secret agents. God does. At the same time as he mercifully uses such a man, he educates and reforms him. But the consciousness of [his former deeds] here again influences unconditional obedience, because such a man, humbled and crushed, must admit that if a man could claim anything of God at all, he himself has absolutely no claim to make but only must submit to everything and yet be grateful for merciful punishment" (JP, #6192 [brackets mine]).

call myself a Christian and that my task is to articulate the issue, the first condition for any possibility of Christianity again (JP, #6932).

He did not regard the edification or upbuilding of his reader to be his responsibility. Rather, he understood the movement of edification to rely upon the reader's improved sense of how she ought to be, of how she might choose herself, in the light of whatever her inwardly directed reading of the books might disclose to her.

From his own experience, he was convinced that certain views of life ultimately proved to be unsatisfactory for anyone, like him, who sought earnestly to live in a manner most true to her humanity. Just as he came to evaluate various approaches to life as qualitatively superior to others through much introspection, he relied upon his interested readers to follow in the same way.

My books lie before the eyes of the world; they are *publici juris*; but I have no right to help anyone with personal prattle to cheaper terms than I myself have been helped -- this would be to deceive him. If anyone wishes to call this self-love, I shall call what he calls love effeminacy (JP, #646).

For this reason, none of his books speaks pedantically to the reader, as to what she ought to know or practice, in order to win her humanity in its highest sense. Each book reflects one or more personal life views: these being either of poetic consistency (which only the idealized pseudonyms could represent), or of historical significance (which only the autographical writings could present).

Kierkegaard found in Christianity and, more precisely, in his own relationship with God, the ideal impetus for continued striving to relate as best he could to God, other people, and himself. He believed that it was easy for citizens of Christendom, himself included, to assume their Christianity in vain. Out of concern for himself, the truth and others, by his life and work he sought to counter-act what he regarded to be the tendency in the official proclamation of Christianity to water down the ideal, passionate aspects of Christian faith. It should be obvious that he was not antisocial.<sup>1</sup>

Just as they reflect different interests Kierkegaard had come to understand in his own development in becoming a Christian, the majority of his works were designed to serve

---

<sup>1</sup> "Another foolish objection to me and my life ... is that I remain apart from life and that this precisely is not religiousness since true religiousness engages actively in life. O, you fools or hypocrites; how do I remain apart from life? In such a way that literally not one single person here at home is so conspicuously at the front of the stage. No, to live apart from life is to run with the flock, to be in the 'crowd,' thereby gaining obscurity but also influence and power. How do I remain apart from life? In such a way that I have created a body of writing hard to match. In such a way that when the rabble raged and domineered I was the only one who dared to act. I remain apart from life in such a way that I am recognized by every child, am a stock character in your plays, my name is a byword, my life is a daily sacrifice in order, religiously to tie a knot, and to get religiousness introduced again. But why then all this talk that I remain apart from life? Well I will tell you. It comes from the fact that in spite of all my work I have no earthly reward, I am not applauded at public gatherings, which I do not attend, but am insulted in the streets, where I am active; it comes from not fashioning my life in a way appropriate to a cabinet appointment; it comes because people detect that I am a fool, a fool -- who fears God" (JP, #6580).



as tools and signposts for those readers who chose to pursue the path of spiritual edification that they marked. He designed the pseudonymous books to elucidate non-Christian views of life, which, without an analysis of categorical clarity, would have passed in everyday discourse as Christian notions. Insofar as his autographic, Christian writings present the requirements of Christian life in their ideality, they too served to undermine whatever naive confidence lay behind the notion of the presence of Christianity in Christendom. Like the pseudonymous effort, this second movement of the authorship is subversive only insofar as the reader might be unaware that the books were designed to have precisely the effect of dispelling her illusory understanding. In this respect, his authorship proffers edification as much in a direction away from particular non-Christian views of life, as it does explicitly towards Christianity as the highest view of life.

Through my writings I hope to achieve the following: to leave behind me so accurate a characterization of Christianity and its relationships in the world that an enthusiastic, noble-minded young person will be able to find in it a map of relationships as accurate as any topographical map from the most famous institutes. I have not had the help of such an author. The old Church Fathers lacked one aspect, they did not know the world (JP, #6283).

In his unpublished Book on Adler, Kierkegaard explains that an author is justified in presenting a particular view of life only once she has herself fully comprehended it.

The essential author ...has his own perspective, he constantly comes behind himself in his individual productions; he strives forward indeed, but within the totality, not after it; he never raises more doubt than he can explain; his *A* is always greater than his *B*; he never makes a move on uncertainty. For he has a definite world-view and life-view which he follows, and with this he is in advance of his individual literary productions, as the whole is always before the parts. ...The essential author is essentially a teacher; ...every essential author is *nourishing*. ...The art of communication consists in coming as close as possible to reality, *i.e.* to contemporaries who are in the position of readers, and yet at the same time to have a view-point, to preserve the comforting and endless distance of ideality (BA, pp. 7, 9).

To ascertain in more specific terms what are the points of departure for, and goal of his communication, we must briefly consider Kierkegaard in his cultural milieu.

He lived from May 5, 1813 until November 11, 1855 and spent most of his lifetime in Copenhagen. Throughout that time, the Danish church enjoyed state sponsorship, with mandatory tithing, state-appointments and government pensions for clergy. In this situation, Kierkegaard recognized an opportunity to live and work for the sake of an idea, namely: 'how to become a Christian' (MA, p. 145). In his Point of View, he reflects upon the situation in which he found himself.

Everyone with some capacity for observation, who seriously considers what is called Christendom, or the conditions in a so-called Christian country, must surely be assailed by profound misgivings. What does it mean that all these thousands and thousands call themselves Christians as a matter of course? These many, many men, of whom the greater part, so far as one can judge, live in categories quite foreign to Christianity! (PV, p. 22)

Kierkegaard's critical response to his community -- which eventually issued in a notorious conflict with *The Corsair* (a public paper with scandalous interests) and, later, in a vehement polemic against the state church of Denmark<sup>1</sup> -- did not develop from any resentment or envy on his part.

He grew up under the earnest tutelage of his father, whose melancholy pietism cast a shadow of peculiar religious extremity over their household. Penitent suffering deeply marked Soren's religious consciousness. As a young man, he came to know the then Bishop Primate of Denmark, Jakob P. Mynster, who was a frequent guest in their home. Early in his university career, he was tutored by Hans Lassen Martensen, Mynster's successor as Bishop. Through these

---

<sup>1</sup> Here we should note that Kierkegaard did not view this latter effort as anything but "a corrective." In other words, he recognized that these particular writings, if taken to suggest a normative position for the earnest Christian to adopt, would only serve to worsen the situation of misunderstanding in Christendom. "The designation 'corrective' is a category of reflection just as: here-there, right-left. The person who is to provide the 'corrective' must study the weak sides of the established scrupulously and penetratingly and then one-sidedly present the opposite -- with expert one-sidedness. Precisely in this consists the corrective, and in this also the resignation in the one who is going to do it. In a certain sense the corrective is expended on the established. If this is done properly, then a presumably sharp head can come along and object that 'the corrective' is one-sided and get the public to believe there is something in what he says. Ye gods! Nothing is easier for the one providing the corrective than to add the other side; but then, right there, it ceases to be the corrective and itself becomes the established order. Therefore an objection of this nature comes from a person utterly lacking the resignation required to provide 'the corrective' and without even the patience to comprehend this" (JP, #6467).

contacts, and others, he enjoyed a unique vantage point from which to experience the sophisticated Christianity of nineteenth century Denmark, which was centered in Copenhagen. His work as an author was a direct response to that sophistication.

[The project] centered upon reflecting Christianity out of an extreme sophistication, refinement, scholarly-scientific confusion, etc., ...[and for the first part of the task] I myself had to have all that refinement, sensitive in one sense as a poet, pure intellect as a thinker (JP, #6308 [brackets mine]).

Following the death of his father, Soren resolved to complete his studies at the university and, on July 3, 1840, completed his examination for his first degree in the theological faculty, *magna cum laude*. On November 17 of the same year, he entered the pastoral seminary. Filial piety led him to complete his degree, *Magister Artium*. All was not well with him, however, for the melancholy affinity he shared with his father led him to break his engagement to marry Regine Olsen just thirteen days after having successfully defended his thesis.

He considered the break to be the consequence of a lack of faith on his part in the face of a collision between the idea of the erotic and the idea of repentance. Any reader of his Journals shall see that his unhappy love for Regina was a central interest behind many of his works and

received particular, albeit indirect, attention in several of his most significant pseudonymous books.<sup>1</sup>

Nowhere in his writings does Kierkegaard imply or outright insist that he was somehow spared the spiritual dangers inherent to living in a 'Christian country' as, for example, that of casually assuming a sense of self-righteousness before God, either in fellowship with, or as over against other persons. He was highly critical of his brother's involvement in a group of high-minded religious purists, and, in several places in his Journals, he recounts his hope that Christianity could entail more joy for others than it did pain for him.

Particularly with regard to spiritual matters, he distrusted any presumed bases for self-congratulation and complacency.<sup>2</sup> To the contrary, he repeatedly insisted that, in his absolute need of God's forgiveness, he was not different from any other person. That consciousness lends a

---

<sup>1</sup> Particularly: Either/Or, Fear and Trembling, Repetition and Stages on Life's Way. Kierkegaard later considered both the unexpected death of his father and his sad relation to Regina to have been occasions for the tutelage of Governance, which, only with hindsight, appeared to have been necessary in his personal development and in the development of the authorship. Kierkegaard dedicated almost all of his edifying discourses to his father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard; the others he dedicated to Regina.

<sup>2</sup> This should be clear to any reader of his Journals; as well, such reflective works as the first part of Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits, titled in English Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing, demonstrate Kierkegaard's desire for honesty in confession and conviction for the basic human need for that.

humble tone to all his work, including his dying effort to apply a corrective to the Danish religious establishment.<sup>1</sup>

'Before God', religiously, when I talk with myself, I call the whole literary activity my own upbringing and development -- not, however, implying that I am now perfect or completely finished so as to need no more upbringing and development (MA, p. 151).

Further, while his Journals provide some insight into the exceptional depth of the penetration of his self-examination and reflect something of the harshness of his own self-critique, they do not support the claim that Kierkegaard, arguing on the basis of his remarkable dialectical skills, understood himself to be qualitatively superior, in a spiritual sense, to any other person.<sup>2</sup>

Tell [the public] my life was one great suffering, unknown to others and misunderstood; it all seemed like pride and vanity, but it was not. I am not a bit better than others, I have always said that and said nothing else (from E. Boesen's account of Kierkegaard's words in hospital in Kierkegaard v.II, p. 586, trans. Lowrie).

Drawing upon the intimate knowledge of self-deception and false pretense that he gleaned from his severe introspection, Kierkegaard applied the same rule to uncovering deceptions at the heart of the Danish religious

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course, had he made protestations to that effect in the prefaces to all his pamphlets, the point of his sarcasm would have been blunted in the scabbard.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, this chapter is not primarily an apology; it is an analysis. I present these biographical details to explicate in concise terms the nature of the authorship in relation to the author.

self-understanding.<sup>1</sup> Unlike many of his contemporaries, he strove earnestly to disenchant the learned members of his society of the idea that they were Christians simply by virtue of their responsible participation in the functions of their 'Christian country.' In part, he endeavoured to do this through his writings. Bringing his acute skills of observation, dialectic and polemic to bear upon himself and his generation, he brought into question the very premise upon which his age had come to depend for autonomous justification, namely, theocentrism.

...But to stir up such a question! Yes, I know the objections well. For there are those who understand what I mean, but would say with a Good-natured slap on the back, 'My dear fellow, you are still rather young to want to embark on such an undertaking, an undertaking which, if it is to have any success at all, will require at least half a score of well-trained missionaries; an undertaking which means neither more nor less than proposing to reintroduce Christianity...into Christendom. No, my dear fellow, let us be men; such an undertaking is beyond your powers and mine. It is just as madly ambitious as wanting to reform the "crowd" with which no sensible person wants to mix. To start such a thing is certain ruin.' Perhaps; but though ruin were certain, it is certain also that no one has learnt this objection from Christianity; for when Christianity came into the world it was still more definitely 'certain ruin' to start such a thing -- and yet it was started. And it is certain, too, that no one learnt this objection from Socrates; for he mixed with the 'crowd' and wanted to reform it (PV, p. 23).

---

<sup>1</sup> Specifically, that of the learned clergy and laity of Copenhagen and its environs, who, Kierkegaard thought, perhaps had failed to appropriate the Christian teaching in fear and trembling, *i.e.*, with appropriate seriousness. According to Kierkegaard, by virtue of their pedagogical and exemplary role, these people were more responsible for misappropriating and misrepresenting the Gospel than were their hearers.

So, we see that the 'reintroduction of Christianity into Christendom' proved to be Kierkegaard's task, as he understood it. Unlike the model of indoctrination, which often is supposed to be normative for such a work, the model of edification that he adopted did not aim to teach directly the gross falsification of Christianity within Christendom.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, as he saw it, the problem was not essentially one of incorrect doctrine. Rather, it was of the nature of a prodigious illusion: the illusion that the official worship of God in the state church was identical, if not in practice, then at least in spirit, with the Christianity of the New Testament.<sup>2</sup>

[M]y life will involve the most precise, existential police-operation in the Christian spirit; everything on all sides

---

<sup>1</sup> "When conflict is over a doctrine, it is easy to stick to the point. The difficulty of my task is that I do indeed say: On the whole, the doctrine as it is taught is entirely sound. Consequently that is not what I am contending for. My contention is that something should be done with it. But an attempt is continually made to drum this out by saying: After all, we are saying the same thing he is, we are teaching the same thing. And since I by no means intend to lead the matter out into external works-righteousness (for then easy recognizability comes again), and since I constantly stress that every one must resort to grace, then it seems as if I am contending for nothing at all. And yet what I am contending for is perhaps the greatest possible distinction: the kind of daily existence led by one who proclaims the doctrine, whether he has all sorts of losses from it, or all sorts of advantages" (JP, #6702).

<sup>2</sup> "The Church does not have to be reformed, nor does the doctrine. If anything has to be done -- then it is penance on the part of all of us. That is what my life expresses" (JP, #6727). See also *This Has To Be Said; So Be It Now Said* (issued May 16, 1855), in "Attack" Upon Christendom, pp. 59-60.



will be arranged to illuminate the theme: by what right does Denmark, especially Copenhagen, call itself Christian, by what right do 1,000 career men make Christianity into a living and nothing else? My life will also be a complete existential study on human selfishness and the deceit and hypocrisy carried on in the name of Christianity (JP, #6499).

Here we must treat briefly the various manifestations of this illusion. To begin with, in Christendom religion and ethics become confused. This confusion arises where the official teachers treat human sin in abstract terms only (as a concern of speculative dogmatics) and not as the personal concern of every Christian believer. As a result, Christian religious sentiment comes to share with paganism the absence of any meaningful sense of redemption. Without the intermediary movement of self-denial inherent to Christian repentance, the government and everyday patterns of social intercourse come to constitute for the individual her standards for virtue, justice and righteousness. When considered in its ethical dimension, the religion of Christendom becomes identical with ethical eudaemonism. We shall develop this discussion at the end of chapter two, where we treat three pseudonyms' views alongside of Kierkegaard's.

Similarly, religion and esthetics become confused in Christendom. Kierkegaard provides many examples of this throughout his Journals, where he criticizes Bishop Mynster's sermons. Here the confusion lies in the difference between reality and fantasy. For example, he observes that Mynster wins the admiring attention of his

congregation when he speaks of the possibility of being contemporary with Christ: that it would be impossible not to be moved to pity and stand by Christ in his various trials with his detractors. Kierkegaard observes that such poetic speculation fails to take into account that even the apostles fell away. The esthetical portrayal of Jesus as the Christ paints a glorious halo about his person, as if this were the immediate, historical reality. By means of the 1,800 years intervening between Jesus' life and the life of the nineteenth century church, the official teachers failed to recognize that every believer must regard Jesus with the same possibility of contemporaneity: the possibility of being offended.

Just as the esthetical-religious preacher of Christianity fails to recognize that her conception lacks a concrete basis, so too her view fails to accommodate the concrete ethical dimension of Christianity: the believer's calling to imitate Christ. Coupled with the speculative error, above, religious education in Christendom circumvents the essentially Christian categories. We shall return to this discussion at the end of chapter two.<sup>1</sup> Here we must note only that Kierkegaard's conception of the truth

---

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to summarize here all that Kierkegaard had to say about properly Christian sentiments and thoughts. It is possible only to refer the reader to his series of specifically Christian discourses, beginning with the unpublished Book on Adler (Foreword dated Jan. 24, 1847) and the Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits (published Mar. 13, 1847), and ending with The Unchangeableness of God (published Sept. 3, 1855).

of Christianity does not ignore sin and redemption; neither does it mitigate the offensiveness of the suffering entailed in Christian existence.

...The basic evil of the age is that, for one thing, it secularizes and finitizes every higher endeavor -- that is, it denies that a higher endeavor truly exists. -- This is why it is so important that I maintain my nonconformity, do not form a party, get followers, perhaps even become a sensate power, so that it practically becomes just as advantageous to line up with me as with the established. No, no, no, thank you. Keep on your own side the profit and the decorations and the velvet etc. -- I have to watch out so that there is not the least profit in lining up with me; I have to watch out that I do not spiritually weaken my cause by secularly strengthening it. The other basic evil of the age is that it is demoralized by intellectuality and has become devoid of character. That is why I have to take care lest my cause become, for God's sake -- serious! -- a scholarly-scientific discussion, in which a random lot of professors and assistant professors et al. could enjoy participating. No, either indirect communication -- or in earnest, a matter of life or death if so be it. But above all -- not a scientific-scholarly discussion (JP, #6859).

Kierkegaard aimed to destroy the identification of Christianity with speculative dogmatics, artistic fancy and civic virtue. Needless to say, he saw the subversion of the authorship to be the most effective way to combat the

situation.<sup>1</sup> As we shall see in chapter two, his pseudonyms began to present his own conception of Christianity, by arguing, against the tide of rationalism, for an understanding of the truth, which takes into account the individual's passionate interest in herself. In this way he

---

<sup>1</sup> "Because everybody knows it, the Christian truth has gradually become a triviality, of which it is difficult to secure a primitive impression. This being the case, the art of communication at last becomes the art of taking away, of luring something away from someone. ...When a man has his mouth so full of food that he is prevented from eating, and is like to starve in consequence, does giving him food consist in stuffing still more of it in his mouth, or does it consist in taking some of it away, so that he can begin to eat? And so also when a man has much knowledge, and his knowledge has little or no significance for him, does a rational communication consist in giving him more knowledge, even supposing that he is loud in his insistence that this is what he needs, or does it not rather consist in taking some of it away? When an author communicates a portion of the knowledge that such a well-informed man has, in a form which makes it seem strange to him, it is as if he took his knowledge away from him, at least provisionally, until by having overcome the opposition of the form he succeeds in assimilating it. ...When an age has systematically and rote-recitingly finished the understanding of Christianity and of all difficulties, so that it jubilantly exclaims how easy it is to understand the difficulty, it is impossible not to entertain a suspicion. For it is better to understand that something is so difficult that it cannot be understood than that a difficulty is so very easy to understand; for if it is so very easy, then perhaps it is not a difficulty at all; since a difficulty is precisely recognizable by the fact that it is hard to understand. When a communication, recognizing such an order of things, does not aim to make the difficulty any easier, then it becomes a process of taking away. The difficulty is clothed in a new form, in which it really is difficult. This then becomes a real communication -- to one who has already found the difficulty easy to understand. And if it happens, ...that a reader is scarcely able to recognize that which he has long finished with in what is thus presented to him, then the communication will give him pause, not by way of adding to his knowledge but by way of taking something from him" (CP, note pp. 245-246). This pseudonymous account is in accord with Kierkegaard's explicit view.

set the stage to differentiate between faith and the mere profession of faith.

It would be premature of us to investigate further the illusions of Christendom without considering, first, the source of Kierkegaard's understanding of the virtue of subversive, indirect communication and, second, the programme of the implementation of his authorship in the service of dispelling the illusion of the Christianity of everyone in Christendom. In this way, we shall become familiar with the nature of his pseudonymity and, at the same time, come closer to answering our second question, regarding the difference between his more popular, pseudonymous works and his autographic reflections.

Prior to the appearance of Either / Or, which marks the beginning of his work as an author,<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard's *Magister* dissertation: The Concept of Irony, with constant reference to Socrates,<sup>2</sup> led him into a vital relation to Socrates's ethically-motivated *maeutic*<sup>3</sup> approach to partners in dialogue. This approach to communication came to play an integral role in Kierkegaard's subsequent writings, up to

---

<sup>1</sup> First published in 1843 -- a pseudonymous book in two volumes.

<sup>2</sup> Accepted July 16, 1841; printed September 16, 1841; defended September 29, 1841. *N.B.*: *Magister* degrees came to be regarded as, and officically named Doctoral degrees around the middle of the nineteenth century in Denmark.

<sup>3</sup> The term means "midwifery" and comes from Socrates's discussion of his role in dialogue.

and including his ten numbers of *The Moment*.<sup>1</sup> Let us consider briefly, then, the meaning of "maeutic dialogue" in connection with Socrates.<sup>2</sup>

In Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus*, the title character enters into a conversation with Socrates about knowledge. In order to bolster his friend's confidence in the enterprise, Socrates proffers the following succinct description of his own role in their discussion:

I suspect that, as you yourself believe, your mind is in labour with some thought it has conceived. Accept, then, the ministrations of a midwife's son who himself practices his mother's art, and do the best you can to answer the questions I ask. Perhaps when I examine your statements I may judge one or another of them to be an unreal phantom. If I then take the abortion from you and cast it away, do not be savage with me like a woman robbed of her first child. People have often felt like that toward me and been positively ready to bite me for taking away some foolish notion they have conceived. They do not see that I am doing them a kindness (*Theaetetus*, 151 b-d).

The maeutic art is the midwife's art. In relation to thought, the enjoyment of dialogue with a skilled partner

---

<sup>1</sup> The first of these polemical pieces appeared on May 24, 1855; the ninth (of ten) was published just seven days before he entered the Frederiks Hospital, where he died on November 11 of the same year. The tenth installment of *The Moment* was published posthumously.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this discussion, no distinction will be drawn between the historical Socrates and Plato's representation of him; in chapter two of this thesis, we will note a distinction Johannes Climacus makes between Socrates and Plato, but we will not come any closer to the quest for the historical Socrates. I selected the passages from the collected writings of Plato for use in this discussion on the basis that they reflect points of view which Kierkegaard attributes to Socrates and which he likely thought ought to have been so attributed.

is analogous to a woman in *travail* receiving the aid of a midwife -- the better the midwife, the smoother the delivery of new consciousness. To sustain the analogy a moment longer, we may note that the midwife is not responsible for the mother and baby; conception and birth would proceed without her assistance, but the midwife's insight into the pregnant woman's condition and ability to guide her through the birth, particularly where complications arise, make her presence by the mother preferable to her absence. In the same way, a skilled dialoguer is not responsible for the ideas that arise in the mind of her partner in discussion, but she is able, through insight into the nature of ideas and the various bad turns thought can take, to guide her fellow through to the delivery of healthy and promising thoughts.

To fail to take into account the indirect nature of the role of someone in Socrates's position in a dialogue is to misunderstand the nature of Socratic dialogue and to deny the soul-integrity of its participants. Socrates, like the midwife, is entirely unable to reap a harvest where no internal seed has already taken root. In other words, Socrates cannot impart wisdom directly to anyone eager to learn; he can only assist in bringing to light whatever has already taken shape in darkness. In another Platonic dialogue, Socrates laments:

My dear Agathon, ...I only wish that wisdom were the kind of thing one could share by sitting next to someone -- if it flowed, for instance, from the one that was full to the one

that was empty, like water in two cups finding its level through a piece of wood (Symposium, 175 d; *emphasis mine*).

The question of the soul-integrity of the participants in dialogue rests upon the Classical Greek conception of the immortality of the soul. It is clear from Socrates's dialogue with Meno and one of his slave boys, that it follows from this doctrine that the communication of both geometrical knowledge (a matter of ethical indifference) and of ethical knowledge (or a personal sense of virtue) occurs only indirectly. According to the Socratic view, this is the case insofar as no necessary direct transfer of the object of knowledge occurs between teacher and learner in the learner's purely recollective education.

With respect to both the teaching of virtue and religious education, that which ought fundamentally to be the object of the communication is *ethical* in nature. That is, it pertains to a passionately appropriated conception of oneself, out of which one endeavours to live in a manner consistent with that conception. Moreover, in order for this self-conception to be ethical, in the strict sense, it must be qualified by a conscious grasp of the difference between good and evil.

Here, we shall recapitulate and elaborate briefly upon the Socratic idea of communication, with reference to *Meno*, and then indicate where Socrates and Kierkegaard, with their respective aims, diverge.



Socrates approached the question of virtue with the assumption that each individual possesses the knowledge of the ethical requisite to enable her to come to ethical consciousness. His maieutic relation to any student of virtue was founded on the premise that the soul of each individual is eternal and, through the infinite experience of repeated incarnation, has actually nothing to learn about itself -- about how it ought to be -- from any external source.

Thus the soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything that is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge of virtue or anything else which, as we see, it once possessed. All nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, so that when a man has recalled a single piece of knowledge -- learned it, in ordinary language -- there is no reason why he should not find out all the rest, if he keeps a stout heart and does not grow weary of the search, for seeking and learning are in fact nothing but recollection (*Meno*, 81 c-d).

On this basis, he understands all movement towards virtuous living to follow the path of recollection. According to this premise, ethical reflection must be an inward movement, related only accidentally to the concrete world, but essentially to the eternal -- to the knowledge of the Good gained through the past experience of the soul.

According to this conception, Socrates, acting as a midwife for Meno's recollection, constitutes a vanishing point in his friend's search for virtue. "...I say there is no such thing as teaching, only recollection" (*Meno*, 82 a).

We can see from this examination, that the dialectic of ethical communication, vis-à-vis Socrates, is strictly the dialectic of indirection. Socrates cannot impart any knowledge of the ethical to his friend, for his friend possesses in himself the condition for ethical consciousness, namely, "the knowledge of virtue."

It would be a paradoxical postulate to assume this understanding to be true, but nevertheless to regard as absolutely necessary one particular historical point of departure (such as a particular relation to a particular teacher) as the indispensable condition for an ethical self-understanding to come into being in any individual's life.<sup>1</sup> For, according to the Socratic view, in relation to ethical self-consciousness, external stimuli can serve merely to draw attention to the possibility for a responsible self-relation; the condition for this lies in each individual. Here one of the most significant differences between Socrates's task and Kierkegaard's task comes to the fore.

In contrast to the singularly maieutic nature (and concomitant inconsequentiality of the particular teacher as the occasion for recollection) of ethical discourse along Socratic lines, the dialectic of ethico-religious communication is a double movement: first, it requires a

---

<sup>1</sup> The pseudonymous books Philosophical Fragments and The Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments both provide thorough investigations of this idea. In chapter two of this thesis we shall consider this discussion.

direct communication of some ethically disinterested, perhaps historical, knowledge; second, it requires maieutic respect for the ethical implications of the learner's appropriation or rejection of the object of the first (direct) communication. According to Kierkegaard, the authentic communication of Christianity is such a double movement. It comprises both direct communication of a knowledge (doctrine) and indirect communication of a realization (inherent to any call to obedience). Of course, the *believer's* appropriation of both objects of the communication of Christianity depends upon her belief and not simply upon her hearing the teaching.

Kierkegaard assumed that the Christian Gospel contains sufficient historical knowledge of the claims of Christ to provide any hearer with the possibility for linking those claims together with her passionate concern for the eternal in her own life. According to Kierkegaard, this dialectical tension constitutes an important facet of Christian existence. The Christian's relation to the historical, the present and the future reflects her earnest relation to the Christ, who is the subjective content of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. Neither the doctrine apart from her personal relation to the Christ, nor her concern for the eternal apart from the Christian doctrine, can alone constitute or sustain her Christianity. In chapter two of this thesis, where we shall discuss

Kierkegaard's idea of Christian faith, we will investigate this dialectical relation further.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas for Socrates the teacher serves merely as a vanishing point in the learner's ethical education, for the individual believer, the Christ becomes the unique and indispensable occasion for her ethico-religious education. For the idea of the role of the Christ as the righteous pattern and saviour for humankind contains an ethical dimension which cannot be disjoined from his concrete, historical existence and, therefore, cannot be found simply in the believer's consciousness.

Ethico-religiously, and Christianly in particular, there is no doctrine that can be regarded as essential while the personal life of the teacher is accidental; here the essential thing is imitation (JP, #3571; trans. Lowrie in Kierkegaard v.II, p. 507).

In contrast to Socrates's conception of the pursuit of virtue through the pursuit of knowledge, we must observe that, for Kierkegaard, knowledge and virtue are not collateral in the same sense; rather, they are reversed. It is in this way that the role of the Christ as the pattern for humanity constitutes the decisive point of departure for Christian ethical consciousness. In his Journals, he observes:

---

<sup>1</sup> More specifically, we shall first encounter this discussion where we treat Johannes Climacus's writings.

Generally every ethical teaching ...comes to the same point -- that knowledge (wisdom) is virtue. Socrates presented this thesis; later, all Socratics. -- Christian teaching is the opposite -- that virtue is knowledge. From this comes the expression -- to do the truth. ...The question is whether knowledge is accented first or last (JP, #895).

Among his posthumous papers, he left a set of notes outlining a proposed series of lectures, to be entitled: *The Dialectic of Ethical and Ethical-Religious Communication* (JP #648-657). As far as he could recall, he prepared these notes sometime in 1847; certainly prior to the publication of Christian Discourses. This detail is significant insofar as the year 1847 marks the point where his published authorship turned away from predominantly pseudonymous, indirect reflection upon various ideas and forms of life, in the direction of explicit and, in all but two instances, autographic reflection upon Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Whereas his *First and Last Declaration* in the Postscript does not explicate fully his intention in employing pseudonyms up to that point, these lecture sketches present a clear picture of his own understanding of communication and the theoretical justification for their use. Of course, the pseudonymous treatment of the works, up to and including the Postscript, which the Postscript furnishes in the section entitled *A Contemporary Effort*, provides much clarity for

---

<sup>1</sup> To account for the apparently anomalous work The Crisis and a Crisis in a Life of an Actress, see The Point of View, pp. 10-14. The two pseudonymous treatments of Christianity are: The Sickness Unto Death (1849) and Practice [or Training] in Christianity (1850), both written by Johannes Anti-Climacus.

understanding the function of the particular books in relation to the others. However, we should not underestimate the value of Kierkegaard's lecture reflections. After all, the observations made in the Postscript are pseudonymous reflections and, as such, belong to the subversive communication itself.

As his point of departure for the lectures, Kierkegaard asserts that "the confusion of the modern age [is] that the ethical is communicated as scholarship and science" (JP, #649, sec. 5). He draws a distinction between that communication, whose object is some specific knowledge, and that whose object is a realization, that is, between scientific and ethical communication, respectively. In the case of the former, a direct relation obtains between teacher and learner -- the object of the communication passes directly between them.<sup>1</sup> In this context, relative differences between persons play a crucial role. It is clear that aptitude and circumstance together contribute to the effectiveness of any communication of scientific

---

<sup>1</sup> Clearly Kierkegaard does not share Socrates's view that all learning is recollection. We have already observed that in connection with the communication of Christianity, that axiom does not fit because Christ, not the individual alone, constitutes the indispensable historical condition for proper eternal consciousness; and here we note that the communication of ethically disinterested knowledge occurs directly, according to Kierkegaard, which does not fit with the idea of recollective, maieutic communication of, for example, geometrical knowledge. Of course, this does not mean that the ethical dimension of Christianity can be communicated directly; that would be a contradiction in terms.

knowledge. It is otherwise where realization, in the ethical sense, is the supposed object of communication.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard did not consider the deceptive situation in Christendom to be derivative from any problem with the first movement of the proper communication of Christianity. Rather, he considered the problem to be rooted in the communication of the ethical dimension of the relation of individual Christians to the Christ.

Despite his deep appreciation for Socrates's noble spirit and method, we can see that he had to learn alone how to transfer the maeutic art, from its *ex tempore* marketplace setting, into the premeditated realm of the written word, in the context of Christendom. But, before we move on to consider just how he managed to do this, we must briefly widen the scope of our inquiry into the relation between Socrates and Kierkegaard, in order to acknowledge the chasm of historical circumstance that categorically separates their respective tasks.

2,200 years stand between these two men. However, from Kierkegaard's point of view, this temporal displacement

---

<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard also calls this "the communication of *capability* or *oughtness capability*" (JP, #653, sec. 8). Understood ethically, no object is transferred from teacher to learner in this communication -- therefore, there obtains no direct relation between parties in this case. However, understood ethico-religiously, there is present a direct communication of historical knowledge which, only once it has been communicated, subsequently precludes any direct relation between teacher and learner respecting ethical appropriation of the idea of the object of the initial, direct communication.

was itself of little interest. Rather, it was the historical event of the life of Jesus of Nazareth (ca. 4 B.C.E. - ca. 30 C.E.), that set them apart fundamentally in terms of ethical direction and historical consciousness.

Whereas Socrates and Kierkegaard had human existence -- with its attendant exigencies -- in common, they could not share the consciousness of the Christian claims about Jesus. According to Kierkegaard, this consciousness carries with it several ethico-religious responsibilities, for example: the ethical requirement to choose to believe whether Jesus spoke with divine authority, the ethical requirement to strive to live in accordance with that choice and, assuming either an affirmative or negative response to the first of these requirements, the ethical requirement to seek to communicate responsibly the content of that



conviction.<sup>1</sup> This difference is decisive in any comparative study of their efforts to provoke their contemporaries individually -- as individuals isolated from the crowd. This, in turn, brings us to consider a distinctive similarity between Socrates and Kierkegaard.

As we have seen in his comments to *Theaetetus*, Socrates was not ignorant of what others thought of himself. In the *Apology*, he compares his provocative role in Athenian society to that of a stinging fly, whose irritating behaviour serves to stimulate an otherwise lackadaisical thoroughbred horse (see *Apology*, 30 e). In answer to the question "Why did Socrates compare himself to a gadfly?", Kierkegaard writes that he did so

because he wanted to have only ethical significance. He did not want to be admired as a genius who stood apart from

---

<sup>1</sup> That these responsibilities are "ethical" means that the individual's relationship to the doctrines of Christianity reflects her relationship to herself. Regardless of her consciousness of the ethical dimension of these claims, she is ethically responsible for herself in her relation to them... In chapter two, where we discuss Anti-Climacus's writings in the light of Johannes Climacus's writings, we shall see how this makes sense. At the end of chapter two we will summarize the idea that, while Christianity overcomes ethics by sin, it cannot be understood apart from the ethical. Here it is important not to confuse ethics, strictly speaking, with social morality. The overlap between the two lies in the determination of the difference between good and evil. With regard to social morality, good and evil are relative terms, dependant upon consensus determination; with regard to ethics, good and evil are absolute polarities. This is why when it is said that "Ethics lives and moves and has its being in the distinction between good and evil" (BA, p. 133), social morality comes to mind for some readers and the ethical, in the strict sense (which encompasses and can explain the dynamics of social morality), comes to mind for others.

others and who therefore essentially made the lives of others easy, since they might say: It's easy enough for him--he's a genius. No, he did only what every man can do; he understood only what every man understands. Therein lies the epigrammatic quality. He bit hard into the individual, constantly compelling and teasing him with this universal. In this way he was a gadfly who prodded by means of the individual's own passion, who did not permit him to admire and admire, comfortably and effeminately, but demanded himself from him. When a person has ethical powers, people will gladly make him out to be a genius merely to get him out of the way, for his life contains a demand (JP, #4265).<sup>1</sup>

For all the affinity between Socrates's and Kierkegaard's appreciation for the nature of ethical learning -- primarily emphasizing the subjective nature of the act of choosing oneself -- it remains a stark contrast between their respective schemes that, whereas for Socrates ethical activity is primarily backwards, for Kierkegaard it is forwards.

For Socrates, the pursuit of virtue denotes the individual's pursuit of the knowledge she has accumulated through her soul's innumerable experiences. This understanding of his position hinges upon the doctrine of the immortal soul, which we examined above, and upon his understanding of the relation between knowledge and virtue: that it is impossible for a person to behave in a manner contrary to the form of life which virtue recommends, given that the individual in question knows the Good.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard proposed to himself the idea of writing a brief work on this subject; see JP, #5953. He never did.

Then if the pleasant is the Good, no one who either knows or believes that there is another possible course of action, better than the one he is following, will ever continue on his present course when he might choose the better. To 'act beneath yourself' is the result of pure ignorance; 'to be your own master' is wisdom. ...And may we define ignorance as having a false opinion and being mistaken on matters of great moment? ...Then it must follow that no one willingly goes to meet evil or what he thinks to be evil. To make for what one believes to be evil, instead of making for the Good, is not, it seems, in human nature, and when faced with the choice of two evils no one will choose the greater when he might choose the less (*Protagoras*, 358 b-d).

Once again, since Socrates asserts both, that every person has prior knowledge of the Good, and that knowledge of the Good cannot lead one anywhere but to a pursuit of virtue, therefore, the knowledge of virtue sought through recollection resides in the experience of previous life in a positive relation to the Good. This means that personal knowledge of the Good is identical with personal virtue.

In contrast to this conception, Kierkegaard understands that the individual comes into existence once only and that human life is related to the future as to the eternal.

To hope is related to the future, to possibility, which again, distinguished from actuality, is always a duality, the possibilities of advancing or of retrogressing, of rising up or of going under, of the Good or of the evil. The eternal *is*, but when the eternal touches time or is in time, they do not meet each other in the *present*, for then the present would itself be the eternal. The present, the moment, is so quickly past, that it really is not present; it is only the boundary and is therefore transitional; whereas the past is what was present. Consequently, if the eternal is in the temporal, it is in the future (for the present cannot get hold of it, and the past is indeed past) or in possibility. The past is actuality; the future is possibility. Eternally the eternal is the eternal; in time the eternal is possibility, the future. Therefore we call

to-morrow the future, but we also call eternal life the future (WL, pp. 233-234).

According to this understanding of human existence, the individual has no 'past' eternal continuity to which she might refer for the knowledge of virtue. Neither has she any point in her personal past, in which she might hope to locate a fixed point of contact with the eternal, that would annul the significance of the forward movement of her life. For, in relation to existence in time, possibility lies ahead of her; thus, her 'possibly good / possibly bad' relation to the eternal rests in her forward relation to it. Of course, for Kierkegaard, "the eternal" denotes the God identified in the Christian canon as the divine Father of the Christ. This understanding isolates for us the point of departure between Socrates and Kierkegaard, vis-a-vis the content and direction of the teaching of the truth.<sup>1</sup>

We may return now, to the question of Kierkegaard's implementation of the maeutic art of communication in his writings. As aids to our inquiry, we enjoy the use of the three aforementioned works, which deal explicitly with the design of the authorship. As well, he included several insights into his idea of the work of any serious author in

---

<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard makes no apology for his exclusive claims about Christianity: that it is the highest truth in relation to which an individual can be assured that she is in the truth. He does not make the claim lightly; nor does he make it as a teacher of the truth. No, he asserts this as the truth for him. And he repeatedly expresses misgivings about his own position vis-a-vis that truth.

a number of his pseudonymous<sup>1</sup> and autographic books.<sup>2</sup> Besides these sources, we have already noted that his extensive Journals and Papers contain a wealth of reflections on the question of communication and, more specifically, on the precise development of the various works. We shall avoid over-reliance upon his retrospective works, such as The Point of View, for such hindsight can be misleading in its confident appraisal of what has gone before. We do not need to refer to particular sayings of several pseudonyms either. Instead, we shall consider two of the works -- one pseudonymous and the other autographic -- in order to recognize the operations of maieutic communication *in concreto*.

Either / Or, with no fewer than five pseudonymous contributors,<sup>3</sup> was edited by Victor Eremita -- himself a pseudonym. In his preface to the work, he remarks that

---

<sup>1</sup> See especially: Preface to EO; see also: FT, R, PF, CA, SL, CP, TC.

<sup>2</sup> See especially: Prefaces to ED; see also: BA, TD, CD, PH, WL, PV, AC, SE.

<sup>3</sup> Namely: Mr. A, Johannes the Seducer, Cordelia, William (Mr. B), and an unnamed parson. Eremita divides the book into two volumes; the first comprising the papers of the otherwise unnamed Mr. A, the second comprising the papers of William, addressed to Mr. A. He describes the two collections as follows: "A's papers contain a multiplicity of approaches to an esthetic view of life. A coherent esthetic view of life can hardly be presented. B's papers contain an ethical view of life" (p.13). Eremita permitted this contrast of life views to guide him in entitling the work (*Ibid.*).

these papers ...might take on a new aspect if they were regarded as belonging to one person. ...We sometimes come upon novels in which specific characters represent contrasting views of life. They usually end with one persuading the other. The point of view ought to speak for itself, but instead the reader is furnished with the historical result that the other was persuaded. I consider it fortunate that these papers provide no enlightenment in this respect. ...Thus, when the book is read, A and B are forgotten; only the points of view confront each other and expect no final decision in the particular personalities (EO v.I, pp. 13,14).

Insofar as there is direct teaching present in the book, it does not didactically address any reader, apart from those assumed to be the original recipients of the various papers and letters. In this way, the individual reader is freed from any formal expectation to make answer to the various claims put forward in the book. We should also acknowledge that, inasmuch as their respective proponents reflect them with poetic self-consistency, the various approaches to life presented are each ideally ethical.

In view of its clarification of categorical differences as, for example, between the esthetical and the ethical, and its Socratic pedagogical respect for the free consideration of its contents by the reader, Either / Or stands as an appropriate beginning to a lifetime exercise in maieutic communication. We shall see how the movements from the esthetical to the ethical, and from the ethical to the religious, in the book reflect Kierkegaard's subversive agenda.

We must yet consider why pseudonyms were Kierkegaard's chosen device for producing the book. For Socrates required no fictional characters to relate his ethical teaching indirectly (subversively) to his students.

One response to this question, which immediately comes to mind, is that Kierkegaard did not wish to identify himself with any of the various life views put forward in the book. His comments in *A First and Last Declaration* lend credence to this answer:

My wish, my prayer, is that, if it might occur to anyone to quote a particular saying from the [pseudonymous] books, he would do me the favor to cite the name of the respective pseudonymous author, i.e. divide between us in such a way that in the sense of woman's juridical right the saying belongs to the pseudonym, and in a civil sense is my responsibility.

But there is a reason behind this.

It would be unreasonable for Kierkegaard to pretend to hold so many views of life simultaneously as entirely valid; more especially so by virtue of his concern to edify his readers maieutically in the direction of Christianity. And, further, it would compromise the integrity of the pseudonyms' respective points of view if each were explicitly related to Kierkegaard, as clever devices in his argument towards Christianity. Clearly, then, there obtains a necessary ironic distance between himself and his pseudonyms.

Presumably, the pseudonyms would have been accepted variously among the readership. A movement from a primarily

esthetical self-relation to a primarily moral self-relation, as that one which William recommends earnestly to Mr. A., provides an occasion for the reader to consider the relative merits of either position, taken in relation to the other. As Eremita observes, there is no historical outcome to the dialogue between A and B in Either / Or, just as there is no clear resolution of the relation between Mr. A and the demonically seductive Johannes in the first volume of the book.

Presenting the situation in this way, the question of what sort of self-relation is preferable moves one step closer to the reader than it would if, for example, it were treated in a play, which, according to convention, would offer some resolution of the conflict for the sake of the audience's pleasure.

In the second volume of the book, William utilizes a term which figures more prominently in the subsequent pseudonymous works and which bears on any study of the nature of the individual pseudonyms; the term is "experiment."

You know how I hate all imaginary constructing [*Experimenteren*], but all the same it may be true that a person can have experienced in thought much that he never comes to experience in actuality. Moments of dejection come sometimes, and if the individual does not himself evoke them in order voluntarily to test himself, this, too, is a struggle and a very earnest struggle, and through this an assurance can be gained that is very significant, even if it does not have the reality [*Realitet*] it would have had if acquired in a real life situation. There are occasions in life when it is a mark of something great and Good in a person that he is as if mad, that he has not separated the world of poetry and the world of actuality but sees the



latter *sub specie poeseos* [under the aspect of poetry] (EO v.II, p. 123).

The term is best understood as the Hongs have translated it: "imaginary construction." In order to win categorical clarity -- in this instance with respect to identifying and distinguishing between particular types of human self-relation -- a fictional figure is cast, who, in turn, either produces literature or serves as the subject of a book, therein reflecting his or her idealized self-relation; such a figure is a psychological experiment.<sup>1</sup>

This reflection is not necessarily immediately perceptible; for certainly an equal degree of flexibility and subtlety is possible for certain of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms as there was actually possible for Kierkegaard himself. Eremita's suggestion that the abhorrent author of *The Seducer's Diary* is such a creation of Mr. A's devising is itself a hint as to his own nature in relation to the (literally considered) author of the book, namely, Kierkegaard.

In several of the pseudonymous books, the reader discovers one pseudonym's review of the work of another and comments respecting probable misunderstandings of their

---

<sup>1</sup> In this connection, "psychological" must be taken to denote an interest in the spiritual condition (self-relation) of the fictional individual being presented. In his Book on Adler, Kierkegaard argues that an essential author, who possesses a clear vision of the direction of his own authorship, uses such experiments to bring his readers along behind him (See BA, pp. 9-11).

respective works. In both Repetition and the section of Stages On Life's Way entitled '*Guilty?/'Not Guilty?*', the term for "imaginary construction" occurs in the full title. In both cases, the pseudonymous writer has created another pseudonym as the vehicle for presenting one perspective on an imaginary situation, against which he contrasts his own, equally ideal position.

An important communicative benefit attached to all these constructions is that none of the pseudonyms is burdened with the maieutically undesirable accretions of actual existence. This permits them to stand out in sharp definition for each reader to approach as she is able and willing. At the same time, it frees them from certain evaluations by which actual persons often are measured and which preclude such unmitigated ideal transparency; for example, whether they have a well-formed nose.

We must now consider in what way the various pseudonyms contribute to the direction and aim of the authorship. Here too, we shall find that Either/Or set the pattern for what was to follow.

Victor Eremita's introductory remarks aid us in recognizing that the book is like a dialogue; indeed, it might be more appropriately deemed a polylogue. The contributors present three qualitatively different approaches to life -- what we will also call subjective

orientations. The first is the esthetical; the second is the ethical; the third is the religious.<sup>1</sup>

The first volume of Either/Or demonstrates the impotence of either passion or reflection alone to afford justifiable choice to an individual. It does this from a perspective offered by a merely esthetical orbit. This idea comes out clearly in the *Diapsalmata* of Mr. A, for example:

I don't feel like doing anything. I don't feel like riding -- the motion is too powerful; I don't feel like walking -- it is too tiring; I don't feel like lying down, for either I would have to stay down, and I don't feel like doing that, or I would have to get up again, and I don't feel like doing that, either. *Summa Summarum*: I don't feel like doing anything (EO v.I, p. 20).

Ask me what you wish; just do not ask me for reasons. A young girl is excused for not being able to state reasons; she lives in feelings, it is said. It is different with me. Ordinarily I have so many and most often such mutually contradictory reasons that for this reason it is impossible for me to state reasons (EO v.I, p. 25).

Mr. A's perspective would not appeal to anyone with ethical sensibilities of either a moral or religious nature. Yet, his view is entirely consistent with his orbit. There is no indication of a lack of mental prowess, nor of any

---

<sup>1</sup> Although the term "stages" is often utilized with reference to these different concerns, I suggest that we replace it with "orbits." This word suggests a relation of movement in time and space with reference to a center of attraction, in relation to which greater and lesser orbital paths denote an encompassing, or an over-lapping, or a collapsing away from various heights (with impending destruction being one distinctly possible outcome). With this language, we shall avoid the assumption of an absolute separation of these three subjective orientations (as if an individual could relate to herself only in terms of one of the three categories at any given time).

inability on his part to recognize what other, apparently better satisfied people do to escape from the implication of his reflections, namely: that life does not justify itself or vindicate its participants. He makes his own choices in life on an arbitrary basis -- yet consistent with his conception of existence.<sup>1</sup>

By virtue of the fine style and intriguing content of Mr. A's papers, coupled with the juxtaposition of William's admonishing letters to him, the esthetical orbit receives outstanding maieutic expression in the first volume of Either / Or.

The root cause of Mr. A's frustration with life, namely, that reflection alone cannot justify his choices -- that it cannot provide him with a perfectly defensible ethical rubric -- is the first, barely perceptible sting of Kierkegaard's methodical gadfly. Of course, it would be a misunderstanding to think that Mr. A. personifies the only imaginable experiment of an esthetically qualified self-relation.

In contrast to Mr. A, who seeks guidance in immediate sensation and unbridled reflection upon

---

<sup>1</sup> This is the only sense in which a purely esthetical subjective orientation can be understood to be ethical. Of course, this is a loose designation, owing to the basic notion that immediacy, not earnest self-reflection, qualifies an esthete's orbit; whereas ethical consciousness requires earnest reflection in the interest of an ideally good self-consistency. Something of the arbitrariness of Mr. A.'s chosen values is apparent in his article entitled *Rotation of Crops*.

possibility, William pursues a steady course through life with reference to "the universal" -- the pattern for life established by his society. The earnest foil he presents to Mr. A's seeming devil-may-care attitude admits of no doubt. His reflections on marriage virtually exude confidence.

While, on the one hand, William recognizes Mr. A's superior intellect, on the other, he steadfastly disdains the latter's inconstancy. Unlike his younger friend, William wishes to contribute what he can to uphold the values of his community. In his particular case, the orbit described is circular; it is also greater than that of Mr. A. The former is true, because he takes from his milieu exactly what he is willing to give back -- everything in moderate measure. Different from Mr. A, and as if he were being labelled by him, William is a model of comfortable mediocrity. His orbit is greater than any purely esthetical orbit, because he is able to appreciate the esthetical in life, without, however, falling an unreflective victim of its essential qualification: everything in a moment.

William's sense of inward continuity -- which might be called the blessing of the ethical -- grants him a sense of what he shall become, directly in line with what he has already chosen himself to be. However, the blessing is not completely assured. The possibility of his immediate society disintegrating, with the consequence that his somewhat immediately conditioned ethical self-understanding would lose its center, demonstrates the precarious nature of

his comfortably mediocre life. Or, something far less tumultuous, at least on the surface, could send him into a tailspin; for example, a conflict between his personal sense of virtue and the dictates of his government.

The last section of Either / Or introduces precisely such a possibility in terms of the religious. The sermon, written by an unnamed acquaintance of William, sums up the religious challenge to William's sense of propriety: *The Upbuilding That Lies in the Thought That in Relation to God We Are Always in the Wrong*. In this way, the second volume of the book serves to present a tasteful rendition of an ethical self-relation without, however, failing to bring this secure vision into serious question. Again, we can see the gadfly is at work.

It is a combination of these orbital relationships which characterizes any actual individual's subjective orientation. Their poetic (ideal) expression in the literary productions of particular pseudonymous authors makes clear which approaches to life Kierkegaard had in mind when he wrote:

If one is to lift a whole generation, verily one must know it. Hence it is that the proclaimers of Christianity who begin straightway with orthodoxy have not much influence, and that only upon the few. For Christendom is very far behind. One must begin with paganism. So it was that I began with *Either/Or*. Thereby I got the generation to go with me; it did not even dream whither it was going, or where we now are. But people became aware of the problems. They cannot be quit of me, just because they went along with *Either/Or* so gladly, so gladly. ...If a man begins at once with Christianity, they say, 'That isn't anything for us,' so at once they are on the defensive. But, as the title of my last Discourses suggests, my whole work as an author is

one great thought, and that is: to wound from behind (see motto on reverse of first page of part three of CD, p.168<sup>1</sup>; compare JP, #6107).

We now have a sense of the nature and purpose of the pseudonyms. They served to exemplify and articulate particular orbits with which various readers could identify personally. Through Kierkegaard's masterful invention, the depth of insight, integrity, and quality of learning that each pseudonym demonstrates -- one could say *personally* -- to his or her readers, constitute intriguing qualities that no Socratic example could have conveyed in comparable fashion.<sup>2</sup>

In the cultured circles of Danish society, where Kierkegaard's pseudonyms were read and for which they were suited, the pseudonyms' sophistication promised to win prolonged attention and perhaps even to provoke, either through vanity or an honest desire for edification on the part of individual readers, a will on their part to reconsider the categories according to which they lived. Readers could identify much better with authors who

---

<sup>1</sup> "...The Christian cause is in need of no defense, it is not served by any defense -- it is aggressive; to defend it is of all misrepresentations the most inexcusable -- it is unconscious crafty treachery. Christianity is aggressive; in Christendom, as a matter of course, it attacks from behind."

<sup>2</sup> Of course, we may draw an analogy between this effort and Plato's dialogues. Elsewhere, Kierkegaard praises Socrates's consistent simplicity in his choice of examples from everyday life to elucidate his meaning in a discussion. Perhaps this constitutes an ironic self-reprimand respecting his own efforts in the literary field.

demonstrated familiarity with their life in Denmark. It was by no means insignificant to Danes at that time that these works were published originally in their language.

By virtue of the plethora of related yet distinct poetized views of life to be found throughout the many pseudonymous works, such identification was likely to meet with some unexpected challenges to its internal sense of security. For example, we have observed in the case of Either / Or, how the esthetical comes to be challenged by the ethical, which, in turn, loses its preeminence to the religious. Kierkegaard's purpose in approaching the public in this way was to capture the attention of individuals, who, as he expected, would not have responded favourably to a direct representation of Christianity as opposed to their preferred categories for successful life within Christendom.

Now we shall turn to the autographic reflections upon Christianity and attempt to understand whether maieutic communication plays a role in them and, if so, how.

Like his first series of Eighteen Edifying Discourses, Kierkegaard's series of specifically Christian discourses received prefaces which shed light on their intended sense. We shall work from his preface to the series entitled For Self-Examination:<sup>1</sup>

My dear reader:

---

<sup>1</sup> Published by Soren Kierkegaard on September 10, 1851.



If it be possible, read aloud! If thou art willing to do that, let me thank thee for it; if thou wilt not only do that thyself but wilt also prompt others to do it, let me thank each one severally and thank thee again and again! By reading aloud thou wilt receive the impression that thou hast to do here only with thyself, not with me, for I am without authority, and not with any other people at all, for that would be a distraction.

August 1851.

S.K.

By these words, we are led to recall the idea of Socratic education. Such communication as aims to instruct indirectly -- that is, by virtue of the learner's interested appropriation and not by virtue of direct, authoritative proclamation -- does not permit the communicator to entertain any certain expectation of the learner's necessary appropriation of her teaching.

Unlike the case with the pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard here offers his own thoughts, from his own perspective, with his own intentions. Outside of the possibility that he wrote to deceive readers about his own position vis-à-vis Christianity, the historical interest here -- that it is Soren Kierkegaard's point of view, against which his life may be judged -- mitigates the degree of subversion that is possible. Here we can see that the similarity between his autographic and pseudonymous writings lies in the question of the reader's appropriation of the point of view. Ideally considered, Kierkegaard's intention to teach autographically promised no greater hope of subjective movement on the part of his readers than did the

intentions which motivated the pseudonymous productions. Subversive or not, the education lay always with the reader.

In this preface, he reiterates Victor Eremita's formula for a potentially edifying reading experience: to allow the point of view to speak for itself, without reference to historical outcome and, therefore, without particular reference to himself or to anyone else. In this way, Kierkegaard sought to maintain maieutic distance from his readers; no more is possible in that direction.<sup>1</sup>

This preface re-introduces an important element in Kierkegaard's understanding of his autographic Christian discourses, that is: that he presented them "without authority." Considered from the point of view of the direction of the authorship -- away from speculation upon Christianity and unChristian sentiment, towards a happy, passionate relation to Christianity -- these explicitly Christian discourses constitute a positive step in the movement.

Despite this continuity, the qualification "without authority" immediately mitigates such an evaluation. Indeed, the initial evaluation is correct, insofar as the explication of the nature of Christianity was due to follow

---

<sup>1</sup> In case he had not been aware of this from the outset, the fact that public interest in the assumed connection between Mr. A's papers and Magister Soren Kierkegaard's personal life led to a sell-out of Either/Or, by this point would have demonstrated to him the freedom of the reader to misappropriate an author's work -- indirect or direct -- vis-à-vis original intention.

what had preceded it. However, the qualification reinforces Kierkegaard's basic denial of any role as a direct communicator of the truth and, in turn, points the reader in the direction of the subjective heart of the doctrine: a personal relationship with God through the Christ. Clearly, this indicates Kierkegaard's awareness that his words could serve only to reflect his own thoughts; that they were not on the order of apostolic proclamation.

These later works round out the authorship and bring it to the pinnacle of his understanding of Christianity and of the relation between God and humankind.

We can see how these later works share certain maieutic characteristics with the pseudonymous books. We should note that, as an author, Kierkegaard differs significantly from his pseudonymous experiments in that he does not represent a static, ideal self-relation.<sup>1</sup>

Through this brief consideration of Kierkegaard's authorship, we have come to recognize grounds for caution in attempting to retrieve from the various works any particular ideas to ascribe to him. It is the interest of the following chapter to sift through the works in order to identify Kierkegaard's thoughts on the relation between reason and faith. Knowing what we do about the pseudonyms, we shall endeavour to attribute to them what is theirs.

---

<sup>1</sup> In terms of representing a specifically Christian orbit, Johannes Anti-Climacus meets the need for an ideal, experimental approach.

Also, we shall trace conceptual lines of continuity in the writings of three of the pseudonyms on this topic, which are properly attributable to Kierkegaard. We shall base our identification of these lines in large part upon readings in his Journals and published autographic works.

## PREFACE TO CHAPTER TWO

### *A Reminder*

...As is well-known, my authorship has two parts: one pseudonymous and the other signed. The pseudonymous writers are poetic creations, poetically maintained so that everything they say is in character with their poetized individualized personalities; sometimes I have carefully explained in a signed preface my own interpretation of what the pseudonym said. Anyone with just a fragment of common sense will perceive that it would be ludicrously confusing to attribute to me everything the poetized characters say. Nevertheless, to be on the safe side, I have expressly urged that anyone who quotes something from the pseudonyms will not attribute the quotation to me (see my postscript to *Concluding Postscript*). It is easy to see that anyone wanting to have a literary lark merely needs to take some verbatim quotations from "The Seducer," then from Johannes Climacus, then from me, etc., print them together as if they were all my words, show how they contradict each other, and create a very chaotic impression, as if the author were a kind of lunatic. Hurrah! That can be done. In my opinion anyone who exploits the poetic in me by quoting the writings in a confusing way is more or less a charlatan or a literary troper (JP, #6786).

## CHAPTER TWO: REASON AND FAITH IN THE AUTHORSHIP

Throughout his authorship, Kierkegaard offers several different treatments of the question of the relation between reason and faith. Besides his autograph books, certain of the pseudonymous works feature this topic prominently, namely: Johannes de Silentio's Fear and Trembling,<sup>1</sup> the incomplete narrative *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*,<sup>2</sup> Johannes Climacus's Philosophical Fragments<sup>3</sup> and Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments,<sup>4</sup> and Johannes Anti-Climacus's The Sickness Unto Death<sup>5</sup> and Training [or Practice] in Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

As we shall see, these three pseudonyms deal with reason and faith in terms uniquely their own. Each offers a

---

<sup>1</sup> Published October 16, 1843.

<sup>2</sup> Begun in November, 1842; never completed; published posthumously.

<sup>3</sup> Published June 13, 1844.

<sup>4</sup> Published February 27, 1846.

<sup>5</sup> Published July 30, 1849.

<sup>6</sup> Published September 27, 1850.

view consistent with his own orbit. Working through these three approaches before considering Kierkegaard's view, will provide us with more complete insight into his understanding of reason and faith and their relation in human consciousness. For, on the one hand, there are significant points of overlap in the work of all four authors. These points offer the careful reader with helpful clarification of concepts perhaps left unclear or underdeveloped in one or more of the other presentations. On the other hand, significant points of difference are present between the various approaches. Of course, these can serve to clarify particular meanings and understandings by virtue of distinction and contrast. As we shall see, Kierkegaard shares with his pseudonyms certain concerns, which hinge upon the answer to the question of the relation between reason and faith.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, then, we aim to win some understanding of the four principal approaches to the question, which the authorship provides. We shall begin with Fear and Trembling.

---

<sup>1</sup> One significant corollary to this investigation will be our developed insight into the inter-relatedness of the constituent types of orbit which the pseudonyms share analogously with Kierkegaard, namely: the esthetical, the ethical and the religious. In this regard, the difference between primarily esthetically-conditioned religious consciousness and primarily ethically-conditioned religious consciousness will be of greatest interest. We shall address this question comparatively at the end of this chapter, where we treat Kierkegaard's understanding of reason and faith.

In his *Preface* to the book, Johannes de Silentio exclaims,

Not only in the business world but also in the world of ideas, our age stages *ein wirklicher Ausverkauf*.<sup>1</sup> Everything can be had at such a bargain price that it becomes a question whether there is finally anyone who will make a bid (FT, p. 5).

He cites the claim of certain contemporaries, who maintain an interest in philosophy and, to that end, claim already to have "gone beyond" doubting everything, after all, "...did not Descartes do it?" (*Ibid.*). His complaint is simply, that the claim to understanding does not necessarily equal the task implicit to the claim. Out of deference to Descartes and, more fundamentally, to honesty, de Silentio casts this discrepancy plainly.

What those ancient Greeks, who after all did know a little about philosophy, assumed to be a task for a whole lifetime, because proficiency in doubting is not acquired in days and weeks, what the old veteran disputant attained, he who had maintained the equilibrium of doubt throughout all the specious arguments, who had intrepidly denied the certainty of the senses and the certainty of thought, who, uncompromising, had defied the anxiety of self-love and the insinuations of fellow feeling -- with that everyone begins in our age (FT, pp. 6-7).

Analogously, he observes, "In our age, everyone is unwilling to stop with faith but goes further" (FT, p. 7).

Rather than attempt negligently to go beyond faith himself, de Silentio seeks to understand faith by considering the account in Genesis of God's trial of

---

<sup>1</sup> "a real sell-out" [my translation]



Abraham, the father of faith.<sup>1</sup> For, as he comments later in the book:

It is easy to explain all existence, faith along with it, without having a conception of what faith is, and the one who counts on being admired for such an explanation is not such a bad calculator, for it is as Boileau says: *Un sot trouve toujours un plus sot, qui l'admire*<sup>2</sup> (FT, p. 55).

Before we consider de Silentio's conception of faith, we should note his approach to Abraham. Following his *Preface*, he presents four re-cast versions of Abraham's ordeal, which, by virtue of their contrast to the original, serve to accentuate Abraham's worthiness as a subject for poetic eulogy. For although these alternative versions of the story provoke passion in the reader, that passion is nothing greater than sympathy. In this way, de Silentio brings the incomprehensibility of the pathos of Abraham's

---

<sup>1</sup> See Genesis 22: 1-13

<sup>2</sup> "One fool always finds a greater fool, who admires him" [my translation].

faith to an eminence above that of the poetic norm.<sup>1</sup> "One cannot weep over Abraham. One approaches him with a *horror religiosus*, as Israel approached Mt. Sinai" (FT, p. 61).

In the eulogy itself, de Silentio makes clear his purely poetic relation to Abraham; in terms of imitation, this relation is negative. "The poet or orator can do nothing that the hero does; he can only admire, love, and delight in him" (FT, p. 15). This brings us to the experimental side of the question of the relation between reason and faith, for which the authorship provides much food for thought, and to which we shall return at the end of the chapter. At this point, however, we will focus upon de Silentio's discussion of faith. Regardless of his merely

---

<sup>1</sup> In a footnote, de Silentio comments: "Generally, if poetry becomes aware of the religious and of the inwardness of individuality, it will acquire far more meaningful tasks than those with which it busies itself now. Again and again we hear this story in poetry: A man is bound to one girl whom he once loved or perhaps never loved properly, for he has seen another girl who is the ideal. A man makes a mistake in life; it was the right street but the wrong house, for directly across the street on the second floor lives the ideal -- this is supposed to be a subject for poetry. A lover has made a mistake, he has seen the beloved by artificial light and thought she had dark hair, but look, on close scrutiny she is a blonde -- but her sister is the ideal. This is supposed to be a subject for poetry. In my opinion, any man like that is an impudent young pup who can be unbearable enough in life but ought to be hissed off stage as soon as he wants to put on airs in poetry. Only passion against passion provides a poetic collision, not this hurly-burly of minutiae within the same passion. In the Middle Ages, for example, when a girl, after having fallen in love, becomes convinced that earthly love is a sin and prefers a heavenly love, this is a poetic collision, and the girl is poetic, because her life is in the idea" (FT, note pp. 91-92).

poetic relation to Abraham, he asserts: "For my part, I presumably can describe the movements of faith" (FT, p. 37).

De Silentio considers faith to be "the highest passion in a person" (FT, p. 122), for, in it, the faithful individual stands absolutely alone with her conviction (FT, p. 114). Having already inwardly renounced life itself, nevertheless she faces the prospect of continuing in life with hope. There is an obvious tension in this thought. We can come to understand it better by considering the dichotomy of what de Silentio calls "the movement of infinite resignation" and "the movement of faith."

Infinite resignation is a willful act. Abraham's predisposition of love towards his son makes clear the significance of his willingness (resignation) to obey God in faith. By accepting God's command that he sacrifice Isaac, Abraham intentionally denies himself any alternative course of action. In other words, had he failed to love Isaac and had he failed to accept the meaning of God's command that he sacrifice Isaac, he would not have faced seriously the impossibility of any alternative. It is precisely Abraham's acceptance, that there is no comprehensible alternative to slaying Isaac at the appointed place, that constitutes his movement of infinite resignation.

Infinite resignation is that shirt mentioned in an old legend. The thread is spun with tears, bleached with tears; the shirt is sewn in tears -- but then it also gives protection better than iron or steel (FT, p. 45).

The protection that infinite resignation offers is security against the assault of mitigating rationalizations, such as any consideration of possibility in terms of probability, shrewdness, or multiplicity might involve.<sup>1</sup> For the idea of infinite resignation is twofold: first, the individual making the movement must be able "to concentrate the whole substance of his life and the meaning of actuality into one single desire" (FT, p. 43) -- Abraham's desire to

---

<sup>1</sup> As we shall see, this explains the "absurdity" in the movement of faith: "The absurd does not belong to the differences that lie within the proper domain of the understanding. It is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen. The moment [Abraham] executed the act of resignation, he was convinced of the impossibility, humanly speaking; that was the conclusion of the understanding, and he had sufficient energy to think it" (FT, pp. 46-47).

obey God is an example of this;<sup>1</sup> second, he must "have the power to concentrate the conclusion of all his thinking into one act of consciousness" (*Ibid.*) -- Abraham's realization of the impossibility of any alternative course of action respecting the demanded sacrifice of Isaac fulfills this aspect of the movement.

If Abraham were to have entertained any doubt as to God's requirement, then human calculation, coupled with the passionate interest necessary for doubt, would have sufficed to free him altogether from making the movement of infinite resignation in the first place. This is the reason de Silentio says of the idea: "If what I say here is to have

---

<sup>1</sup> It would be a mistake to regard Abraham's love for Isaac to be this one single desire, for that would mean to divest his resignation to obey God of its primary significance. In other words, were Isaac's life and the fulfillment of God's promise in him the one single desire of Abraham's life, then Abraham's act of resignation would have been a movement against God's demand for the sacrifice. He would have regarded obedience to God as absolutely impossible; in deference to his higher duty to Isaac, he would have had to suspend his duty to God. Such an interpretation would be inconsistent with de Silentio's discussion of the teleological suspension of the ethical (to be discussed later). Instead, Isaac is that which Abraham gives up in infinite resignation. See, for example, FT, p. 76: "In the same way, Abraham now and then could have wished that the task were to love Isaac as a father would and should, understandable to all, memorable for all time; he could have wished that the task were to sacrifice Isaac to the universal, that he could inspire fathers to laudable deeds -- ...He knew that it is glorious to express the universal, glorious to live with Isaac. But this is not the task." Of course, insofar as God's gift of Isaac carries with it a divine imperative of responsibility and love for Abraham, there exists a peculiar tension in God's testing of Abraham, namely, the inscrutability of God's ways which two apparently conflicting divine commands demonstrate.

any meaning, the point is that the movement is undertaken normatively" (FT, p. 42).

In his resignation, then, Abraham's duty towards his son becomes suspended in relation to his absolute duty towards God. That is, in his resignation, Abraham gives up Isaac, God's promise for the future, and any hope that this action might be understood by anyone else. This movement is not the same as the movement of faith; but, de Silentio asserts, faith cannot be properly understood apart from it.

Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith, for only in infinite resignation do I become conscious of my eternal validity, and only then can one speak of grasping existence by virtue of faith (FT, p. 46).

In contrast to the movement of infinite resignation, the movement of faith returns the individual to her life, with all its finite, temporal interests, with positive expectation. Faith overcomes infinite resignation. It is precisely for this reason that faith must be understood in relation to the prior movement of infinite resignation.

It takes a purely human courage to renounce the whole temporal realm in order to gain eternity [infinite resignation], but this I do gain and in all eternity can never renounce -- it is a self-contradiction. But it takes a paradoxical and humble courage to grasp the whole temporal realm now by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith. By faith Abraham did not renounce Isaac, but by faith Abraham received Isaac (FT, p. 49 [brackets mine]).

Abraham's faith enables him to expect God's promise in Isaac to be fulfilled. In other words, he believes that

he will not lose Isaac at Moriah. This runs completely counter to the understanding of his movement of infinite resignation; this is the author's point.

This understanding of the dependance, in part,<sup>1</sup> of faith upon a prior movement of infinite resignation, frees faith from any immediate characterization, that is, as being merely "esthetic emotion" or "the spontaneous inclination of the heart" (FT, p. 47). "Faith is not the esthetic" (FT, p. 82).

It is important to recognize that, where faith is present, infinite resignation is equally present. Without infinite resignation, there exists in the individual no negative, renunciatory relation to finitude, in relation to which faith makes the opposite movement. De Silentio calls this tension the paradox of faith. "The act of resignation does not require faith, but to get the least little bit more than my eternal consciousness requires faith, for this is the paradox" (FT, p. 48).

The paradox arises, because by faith the individual relates herself positively to precisely those finite concerns which she has suspended in infinite resignation. There are two levels of tension here: the tension of

---

<sup>1</sup> I say 'in part,' because the idea of the entire movement is contingent also upon the spiritual ground of faith, which we shall discuss below.

infinite resignation and the tension of faith, but only in faith does the tension constitute a paradox.<sup>1</sup>

For the faithful individual, her prior movement of infinite resignation involves a collision of interest between her wish and her duty, the outcome of which is the dutiful annihilation of the content of her wish in the interest of her duty. Her movement of faith, on the other hand, involves a collision of conviction between her infinite resignation and her faith; for, in faith, the content of her wish and the content of her duty correspond. But this correspondence is a tension insofar as the conclusion of her thinking in infinite resignation stands between her initial (immediate) wish and the expectation of her faith, namely, that the object of her wish and the object of her duty are identical.

De Silentio complains that "the movements are often confused" (FT, p. 48). By choosing to ignore the antecedent movement of infinite resignation, readers of the story rob Abraham's ordeal of its great pathos. Taking advantage of knowing beforehand that the story has a happy ending, they fail to consider Abraham's agony in believing against his understanding that, the commanded sacrifice notwithstanding, he will not lose Isaac.

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course, to any third party, who understands the divine only in immanent terms, Abraham's infinite resignation will itself seem paradoxical, insofar as, by his deed, he suspends the ethical (in the sense of social morality) absolutely (see discussion below).



[W]e are curious about the result, just as we are curious about the way a book turns out. We do not want to know anything about the anxiety, the distress, the paradox. We carry on an esthetic flirtation with the result (FT, p. 63).

For de Silentio, then, we see that, in order for faith to pose an absolute collision in an individual's life, the movement of infinite resignation must precede it. Otherwise, there would be no sense in speaking of it as a subsequent, paradoxical movement. In this way, the movement of faith is understood to be contingent, not only upon the preceding movement of infinite resignation, but also upon some transcendent ground, by virtue of which the first movement is over-turned, yet not denied. Faith, then, is not a matter of pure immediacy. Rather, it must be understood to be a "later immediacy" (FT, p. 82), which is won through passion<sup>1</sup> and thorough reflection<sup>2</sup> upon the following two polarities: first, the annihilation of the wish in infinite resignation and, second, the restoration of

---

<sup>1</sup> "Every movement of infinity is carried out through passion, and no reflection can produce a movement. This is the continual leap in existence that explains the movement... Just to make the celebrated Socratic distinction between what one understands and what one does not understand requires passion; and even more, of course, [passion is necessary in order] to make the authentic Socratic movement, the movement of ignorance" (FT, note p. 42).

<sup>2</sup> Of course, the claim that no amount of reflection can produce either movement does not preclude reflection from playing a role in the movements. Indeed, were reflection excluded from either movement, then it would be difficult to argue that neither movement belonged properly and exclusively within the sphere of "the first immediacy" (see FT, p. 82).

the wish by virtue of the absurd. That is, in the face of the impossibility, nevertheless to believe dutifully that with God all things are possible. "[B]y virtue of the absurd it is indeed possible that God could do something entirely different" (FT, p. 119).

Although infinite resignation and faith share passion and reflection as common elements, it does not follow that either faculty is limited to only one path. That is, if we take seriously de Silentio's thesis, that the two movements are radically different from one another, we must recognize that Abraham, in his passion and reflection, finds an appropriate referent by which the seriousness of his first movement is preserved, without, however, allowing that conviction to stand in the way of the second movement. In order to clarify this, we must consider what the author has to say about reason in relation to both infinite resignation and faith.

In order not to confuse the inquiry with categories foreign to de Silentio's book,<sup>1</sup> we must begin with his assertion that "[t]emporality, finitude -- that is what it is all about" (FT, p.49). He is not concerned to present anything outside these parameters as positively commensurable with his investigation.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> "The whole work is centered on Abraham, and I can still encompass him in immediate categories -- that is, insofar as I can understand him" (FT, p. 98 note).

<sup>2</sup> This reflects his purely poetic relation to Abraham as the father of faith.

Insofar as the movement of infinite resignation is understood to be "a purely philosophical movement that I venture to make when it is demanded and can discipline myself to make" (FT, p.48), there is no need to refer to categories outside the boundary of finitude and temporality in order to understand it.<sup>1</sup>

Through resignation I renounce everything. I make this movement all by myself, and if I do not make it, it is because I am too cowardly and soft and devoid of enthusiasm and do not feel the significance of the high dignity assigned to every human being, to be his own censor... (FT, p. 48).

De Silentio draws an analogy between Abraham's movement of infinite resignation in his relation to Isaac, and the movements of the tragic heroes: Agamemnon, Jephthah and Brutus. According to the category of religious immanence, the ethical, in the sense of social morality,<sup>2</sup> reflects the divine will (FT, pp. 54-61, 82). So, "[i]n ethical terms, Abraham's relation to Isaac is quite simply this: the father shall love the son more than himself" (FT, p. 57). The same is true for Agamemnon, Jephthah and Brutus in relation to their children.

---

<sup>1</sup> We shall see that, in contrast to understanding the movements of resignation made by Agamemnon, Jephthah and Brutus, it is necessary to refer outside these boundaries to understand Abraham's resignation. Appropriately, de Silentio's approach is *via negativa*.

<sup>2</sup> *Nota bene*: We must bear in mind that, throughout this book, "the ethical" denotes nothing other than "social morality;" in this respect Fear and Trembling utilizes the term "the ethical" differently from the other works of the authorship.

Each of these men faces the ordeal of being required to sacrifice his child. In this respect, they each experience similar poetic collisions. That is, each is passionately concerned for his child; nevertheless, each is required to suspend the dutiful implication of that passion in response to a higher imperative.<sup>1</sup> That none of them sees any legitimate alternative to this suspension, indicates that each makes the movement of infinite resignation. We must assume that all four men act in the confidence that there exists no higher court to which they might appeal their assigned tasks.

Upon further consideration, however, de Silentio points out that Abraham's resignation is qualitatively different from that of the other fathers. Whereas the other three are able to reconcile their deeds with a higher *telos* within the ethical sphere, Abraham's intention is incommensurable with any immanent construal of his ethical obligations. De Silentio calls this a "teleological suspension of the ethical" (see FT, pp. 54 - 67).

---

<sup>1</sup> "The tragic hero assures himself that the ethical obligation is totally present in him by transforming it into a wish. Agamemnon, for example, can say: To me the proof that I am not violating my fatherly duty is that my duty is my one and only wish. Consequently we have wish and duty face to face with each other. Happy is the life in which they coincide, in which my wish is my duty and the reverse, and for most men the task in life is simply to adhere to their duty and to transform it by their enthusiasm into their wish. The tragic hero gives up his wish in order to fulfill this duty" (FT, p. 78 note).

The difference between the tragic hero and Abraham is very obvious. The tragic hero is still within the ethical. He allows an expression of the ethical to have its *telos* in a higher expression of the ethical; he scales down the ethical relation between father and son or daughter and father to a feeling that has its dialectic in its relation to the idea of moral conduct (FT, p. 59).

For Agamemnon, "soon the whole nation will be initiated into his agony and also into his deed, that for the welfare of all he will sacrifice her, his daughter, the lovely young girl"; for Jephthah, "...every freeborn man will understand, every resolute woman will admire [him], and every virgin in Israel will wish to behave as his daughter did, [for without his act], would not the victory be taken away from the people again?"; for Brutus, "no one in the nation, not even the son, will fail to admire the father, [for] it will be remembered that ...no one [interpreted the Roman laws] more magnificently than [he]" (FT, pp. 57-58).

By contrast, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac is positively incommensurable with the category of the universal.<sup>1</sup> His obedience to God is a purely private matter, which excludes any thought of ethical justification. "By his act [Abraham] transgressed the ethical altogether

---

<sup>1</sup> Negatively, it is commensurable with the category of the universal as an evil act.

and had a higher *telos* outside it, in relation to which he suspended it" (FT, p. 59).<sup>1</sup>

Abraham must make the movement of infinite resignation over against absolutely everything through which he might formerly have been assumed by anyone else to enjoy his relationship to God, that is, in relation to all finite and temporal concerns. The relation of the three tragic heroes to the divine is preserved in their evaluation of their ethical responsibility; for in their case, the divine is immanence<sup>2</sup> -- in Abraham's case, it is transcendence.

Paganism does not know such a relationship to the divine. The tragic hero does not enter into any private relationship to the divine, but the ethical is the divine, and thus the paradox [of conflicting duties and wishes] therein can be mediated in the universal. Abraham cannot be mediated; in other words, he cannot speak. As soon as I speak, I express

---

<sup>1</sup> We shall see that the same characteristic holds for the movement of faith; for example, see FT, p. 70: "The paradox of faith, then is this: that the single individual is higher than the universal, that the single individual -- to recall a distinction in dogmatics rather rare these days -- determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal."

<sup>2</sup> The opening paragraph to the section of the book called *Problema II* presents this idea clearly: "The ethical is the universal, and as such it is also the divine. Thus it is proper to say that every duty is essentially duty to God, but if no more can be said than this, then it is also said that I actually have no duty to God. The duty becomes duty by being traced back to God, but in the duty itself I do not enter into relation to God. ...The whole existence of the human race rounds itself off as a perfect, self-contained sphere, and then the ethical is that which limits and fills at one and the same time. God comes to be an invisible vanishing point, an impotent thought; his power is only in the ethical, which fills all of existence" (FT, p. 68).

the universal, and if I do not do so, no one can understand me (FT, p. 60).

One might assume that Abraham's fatherly responsibility towards Isaac is something he could understand immediately, by virtue of his role in the family. The trial of his faith does not bring this understanding into question; rather, it is precisely because he loves Isaac and because this passion is commensurable with social morality, that the trial can be identified as a trial of faith. More specifically, "it is an ordeal such that, please note, the ethical is the temptation" (FT, p. 115).

However, according to this understanding of the provenance of Abraham's sense of fatherly obligation, no poetic collision occurs that would be worthy of de Silentio's praise; for the tension here would lie between how others construe Abraham's highest obligation and how he construes it himself. Instead, this is a collision by virtue of the fact that Abraham's test is in his own private interest and God's<sup>1</sup> (see FT, pp. 59-60); it has nothing to do with any third-party evaluation. "The observer cannot understand him at all; neither can his eye rest upon him

---

<sup>1</sup> See FT, pp. 59-60: "Why, then, does Abraham do it? For God's sake and -- the two are wholly identical -- for his own sake. He does it for God's sake because God demands this proof of his faith; he does it for his own sake so that he can prove it. The unity of the two is altogether correctly expressed in the word already used to describe this relationship. It is an ordeal, a temptation."

with confidence" (FT, pp. 60-61). This tension is external to Abraham; it resides in the dumbfounded spectator.

We must recognize that his passionate attachment to Isaac is not comparable with that between Agamemnon and Iphigeneia, for example, for the intermediary in Abraham's case is his absolute passionate attachment to God's will, not the universal.

For this reason, we can see that the idea of an immediate provenance for Abraham's sense of duty does not properly explain Abraham's relation to Isaac. From the outset of the story, it is his passionate relation to God that categorically defines his obligation to Isaac. Already prior to the test of his faith, Abraham's relation to Isaac was absolutely conditioned by his relation to God. In other words, his love for Isaac proceeds as an act of faith itself. That the fact of the collision between the ethical standard and Abraham's private religious consciousness becomes visible in the test, does not disprove the existence of the collision prior to the test. In fact, this very collision is a constant element in possibility in Abraham's consciousness, by virtue of the fact that he lives by faith, and the idea of the collision is simply an expression for his continual movement of infinite resignation.

The absolute duty can lead one to do what ethics would forbid, but it can never lead the knight of faith to stop



loving.<sup>1</sup> Abraham demonstrates this. In the moment he is about to sacrifice Isaac, the ethical expression for what he is doing is: he hates Isaac. But if he actually hates Isaac, he can rest assured that God does not demand this of him, for Cain and Abraham are not identical. He must love Isaac with his whole soul. Since God claims Isaac, he must, if possible, love him even more, and only then can he *sacrifice* him, for it is indeed this love for Isaac that makes his act a sacrifice by its paradoxical contrast to his love for God (FT, p. 74).<sup>2</sup>

For Abraham, the collision consists in two conflicting absolute commands: that he love his son -- and so place Isaac's interests ahead of his own -- and that he obey God's command that Isaac be sacrificed. No one has access to this tension apart from Abraham and God. "[T]o fight against the whole world is a consolation, to fight against oneself is frightful" (FT, p. 114).

---

<sup>1</sup> This might be taken to imply that, for de Silentio, love is an immanent manifestation of God's transcendent law. Against this, I favour the interpretation that, because "the knight of faith" does everything in the world by virtue of faith, therefore it is necessary to assume that his passion to love constitutes for him an absolute duty, which, through its absolute referent, can equally "lead one to do what ethics would forbid" ("ethics" being understood in the relative sense of social morality).

<sup>2</sup> See also FT, p. 70: "The paradox may also be expressed in this way: that there is an absolute duty to God, for in this relationship of duty the individual relates himself as the single individual absolutely to the absolute. In this connection, to say that it is a duty to love God means something different from the above, for if this duty is absolute, then the ethical is reduced to the relative. From this it does not follow that the ethical should be invalidated; rather, the ethical receives a completely different expression, a paradoxical expression, such as, for example, that love to God may bring the knight of faith to give his love to the neighbor -- an expression opposite to that which, ethically speaking, is duty (*Ibid.*).

In the end, the resignation of Agamemnon, Jephthah and Brutus is not the same as Abraham's, for they enjoy the sympathy of others, who likewise construe their submission to the death of the children in terms which respect their common sense of ethical responsibility. In other words, the three of them are not alone in their suffering and are able to express all that goes on in their minds and hearts. "The tragic hero does not know the dreadful responsibility of loneliness" (FT, p. 114).

In contrast to this, Abraham's test is a matter between himself and God; no one else can appreciate it. Abraham is different from the three heroes, not only by virtue of his qualitatively superior infinite resignation, but also by virtue of the fact that he makes the next movement, the movement of faith. His actions do not directly demonstrate his love for Isaac, so he cannot rely upon anyone to understand his trial. "So Abraham did not speak, ...since for [him] the ethical had no higher expression than family life" (FT, p. 112). Further, even were he to declare that he loves Isaac, Abraham would immediately be misunderstood, for his love for Isaac is tied together with his desire to obey God in the sacrifice, by virtue of faith.

Abraham remains silent -- but he *cannot* speak. Therein lies the distress and anxiety. Even though I go on talking night and day without interruption, if I cannot make myself understood when I speak, then I am not speaking. This is the case with Abraham. He can say everything, but one thing he cannot say, and if he cannot say that -- that is, say it in such a way that the other understands it -- then he is

not speaking. The relief provided by speaking is that it translates me into the universal. Now, Abraham can describe his love for Isaac in the most beautiful words to be found in any language. But this is not what is on his mind; it is something deeper, that he is going to sacrifice Isaac because it is an ordeal. No one can understand the latter, and thus everyone can only misunderstand the former (FT, p. 113).

In order for his isolation to be complete, and in order moreover to fulfill de Silentio's criterion for a truly poetic collision, Abraham must experience a tension between equal magnitudes -- more precisely, a tension between conflicting movements of faith (themselves tensions between impossibility and possibility) that separates him from the "cryptically present universal" in Isaac (FT, p. 59). For Abraham, this tension arises between, on the one hand, the command to love Isaac, which is implicit in God's gift and is contingent upon an act of faith,<sup>1</sup> and, on the other hand, the command to prove his faith by giving up Isaac (which tautologically is contingent upon an act of faith).

But this is misleading, for, as it is worded, this second polarity implies nothing greater than a test of infinite resignation. In order that the tension be between equal polarities, the second must also require an act of faith. In order to fulfill the requirement for a movement of faith, the second polarity must be expanded to include

---

<sup>1</sup> See FT, pp. 17-20.

Abraham's confidence that, obedience to God's command notwithstanding, he will not lose Isaac and the promise.

Consequently, he acknowledges the impossibility, and in the very same moment he believes the absurd, for if he wants to imagine that he has faith without passionately acknowledging the impossibility with his whole heart and soul, he is deceiving himself and his testimony is neither here nor there, since he has not even attained infinite resignation (FT, p. 47).

We must recognize that the test of Abraham's faith does not signal the beginning of it. "By faith Abraham emigrated from the land of his fathers and became an alien in the promised land" (FT, p. 17). At least from this point, de Silentio draws attention to the question of the relation between reason and faith. "[Abraham] left one thing behind, took one thing along: he left behind his worldly understanding, and he took along faith" (*Ibid.*). Presumably, this means that "worldly understanding" and "faith" are antithetical.

We can make sense of this distinction if we understand that "worldly understanding" pertains only to reflection upon possibility, with immediate reference to temporality and finitude. This view explains why none of the three tragic heroes believes that he will receive his child in spite of the task at hand. They each make only the movement of infinite resignation and, as we have seen, their conviction is strengthened with reference to the highest authority they recognize, namely, the social norm. But the social norm is a finite standard, entirely without reference

to the transcendent. Thus, they each depend upon finite contingency to describe the limits of their expectation.

But the deciding factor here is not whether resignation occurs in response to an immanent or transcendent authority. De Silentio makes it clear that, if Abraham were to end his considerations with infinite resignation, then he too would see no possibility to receive Isaac through the ordeal. So we see that worldly understanding can work with absolutes, but only where passion is sufficient and only when possibility can be grasped in terms of finite expectancy.

By virtue of the fact that Abraham makes the movement of faith, it is clear that the confines of impossibility, that could have stifled his reflection in infinite resignation, are not binding where a further category is brought under consideration, namely, that for God all things are possible.

Insofar as we can assume that Abraham has some conception of what it would mean for him to receive Isaac, despite the demanded sacrifice, we can assume also that reflection here deals with possibilities qualified by the new category of all things being possible with God. Reflection does not conclude anything from the new category of possibility, for the possibility of not losing Isaac is only one of innumerable possibilities where the idea of God's absolute freedom obtains.

The *passion* of Abraham's faith enables him to relinquish from reflection all but the one possibility. But the ground for this passion cannot reside in reflection, for otherwise reflection would supplant for the movement of faith a movement of understanding.

In the opening to his *Eulogy on Abraham*, de Silentio suggests that the provenance of the possibility for this passion in relation to the eternal is a concern of anthropology.

If a human being did not have an eternal consciousness, ...if there were no sacred bond that knit humankind together, ...if an eternal oblivion, perpetually hungry, lurked for its prey and there were no power strong enough to wrench that away from it -- how empty and devoid of consolation life would be! But precisely for that reason it is not so, ...as God created man and woman. (FT, p. 15).

He goes on to assert that the peculiar greatness of Abraham reflects his positive relation to God; and that positive relation is identifiable in contrast to the positive relation of worldly (immediate) wisdom.

There was one who was great by virtue of his power, and one who was great by virtue of his wisdom, and one who was great by virtue of his hope, and one who was great by virtue of his love, but Abraham was greatest of all, great by that power whose strength is powerlessness, great by that wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by that hope whose form is madness, great by the love that is hatred to oneself (FT, pp. 16-17).

Because his faith relation to God figures consistently as the middle term between himself and his

finite concerns, Abraham's "greatness" is hidden from everyone else.<sup>1</sup>

The authentic tragic hero sacrifices himself and everything that is his for the universal; his act and every emotion in him belong to the universal; he is open and in this disclosure he is the beloved son of ethics. This does not fit Abraham; he does nothing for the universal and is hidden (FT, p. 113).

Either his faith-consciousness is hidden by virtue of a coincidence, such as was the case, prior to his test, in the external correspondence between his love for Isaac and the universal idea of his love for Isaac (but this is a merely superficial hiddenness), or it is and remains hidden always by virtue of the idea that "subjectivity is higher than actuality" (FT, p. 111). This means, simply, that, in her relation to God, an individual can be justified in withholding from her society the inner movements of that relation.

In the Sermon on the Mount, it says: When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men. This passage shows clearly that subjectivity is incommensurable with actuality, indeed, that it has the right to deceive (FT, pp. 111-112).

For de Silentio, Abraham was exceptional. "Abraham did not become the single individual [in a self-conscious relation to God] by way of sin -- on the contrary, he was a

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course, when viewed from the standpoint of the three tragic heroes, Abraham, "[in] the paradox of faith has lost the intermediary, that is, the universal" (FT, p. 71).

righteous man, God's chosen one" (FT, p. 99). Abraham is the recipient of privileged revelation; his passionate relation to God is rooted in that experience. Presumably, he is able at any moment to reject the positivity of this relation through disobedience. For, otherwise, his double movement of faith could not properly be deemed *his*. We have already discussed the nature of the tensions that he faces; these two factors<sup>1</sup> are what make of his passion such a marvel for de Silentio.

The knight of faith is assigned solely to himself; he feels the pain of being unable to make himself understandable to others, but he has no vain desire to instruct others. ...The true knight of faith is a witness, never the teacher, and therein lies the profound humanity, which has much more to it than this trifling participation in the woes and welfare of other people that is extolled under the name of sympathy, although, on the contrary, it is nothing more than vanity (FT, p. 80).

De Silentio indicates, albeit briefly, a basis other than direct revelation, in relation to which an individual's subjective passion might lead her to make the movements of

---

<sup>1</sup> Namely: the factor of his ability to choose to obey and the factor of his being alone before God in the test of faith.



infinite resignation and faith, namely, sin and sin-consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

Up until now I have assiduously avoided any reference to the question of sin and its reality. ...As soon as sin emerges, ethics founders precisely on repentance; for repentance is the highest ethical expression, but precisely as such it is the deepest ethical self-contradiction (FT, p. 98 note).

The first indication of this possibility lies in de Silentio's assumption that human beings are created by God. For, under the rubric of the thought that for God all things are possible, lies the possibility that each person could enter into a passionate relationship to God and that this relation not be necessarily contingent upon direct revelation. De Silentio alludes to this where he contrasts Abraham's becoming the single individual before God to the situation of an individual with a consciousness of sin (see FT, p. 99).

[W]hen the single individual by his guilt has come outside the universal, he can return only by virtue of having come

---

<sup>1</sup> "Now here I would like to make a comment that says more than has been said at any point previously. Sin is not the first immediacy; sin is a later immediacy. In sin, the single individual is already higher (in the direction of the demonic paradox) than the universal, because it is a contradiction on the part of the universal to want to demand itself from a person who lacks the *conditio sine qua non*. If, along with other things, philosophy were also to think that it just might enter a man's head to want to act according to its teaching, we would get a strange kind of comedy out of it. An ethics that ignores sin is a completely futile discipline, but if it affirms sin, then it has *eo ipso* exceeded itself. Philosophy teaches that the immediate should be annulled. That is true enough, but what is not true is that sin is directly the immediate, any more than faith is directly the immediate" (FT, pp. 98-99).

as the single individual into an absolute relation to the absolute (FT, p. 98).

De Silentio ends the book emphasizing two points.

First, he emphasizes...

an honest earnestness that fearlessly and incorruptibly points to the tasks, an honest earnestness that lovingly maintains the tasks, that does not disquiet people into wanting to attain the highest too hastily but keeps the tasks young and beautiful and lovely to look at, inviting to all and yet also difficult and inspiring to the noble-minded (FT, p. 121).

In this way, he returns attention to his initial complaint, that people can exaggerate their own self-understanding by claiming accomplishments that they have not actually attained.

Second, he emphasizes the idea of subjectivity in relation to passions.

Whatever one generation learns from another, no generation learns the essentially human from a previous one. In this respect, each generation begins primitively... The essentially human is passion, in which one generation perfectly understands another and understands itself. For example, no generation has learned to love from another, no generation has a more abridged task than the previous one, and if someone desires to go further and not stop with loving as the previous generation did, this is foolish and idle talk. But the highest passion in a person is faith, and here no generation begins at any other point than where the previous one did. ...As long as the generation is concerned only about its task, which is the highest, it cannot become weary, for the task is always adequate for a person's lifetime (FT, pp. 121, 122).

In Johannes Climacus's work we find a more thorough discussion of the role of reason in relation to the passions of doubt, sin-consciousness, and faith. His work is

different from de Silentio's in that it aims towards dialectical clarity respecting the idea of specifically Christian existence -- the nature of the subjective movements involved in becoming a Christian. While he does not presume to judge whether Christianity is 'the truth,' he asserts that the task of becoming a Christian is the most difficult task for any person's lifetime.

[O]ur treatment of the problem [of the possibility of an historical point of departure for an eternal consciousness] does not raise the question of the truth of Christianity. It merely deals with the question of the individual's relationship to Christianity (CP, p. 18).

One central aspect of his approach is his comparative consideration of the Socratic understanding of the human pursuit of truth and those specifically Christian categories which present a meaningful alternative to the Socratic view. While some terms, such as "the absurd," occur in both authors' books in connection with faith, we shall recognize that their meanings are not identical. Climacus addresses the ideal possibility of a Christian's relation to God in faith. This is quite different from de Silentio's treatment of Abraham in his exceptional, righteous relation to God.

In the incomplete narrative *Johannes Climacus or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, Climacus makes some interesting claims about the nature of consciousness, reflection, doubt and faith. Following his initial reflections on the three

theses of the philosophizers,<sup>1</sup> Climacus addresses the question of "*doubt's ideal possibility in consciousness*" (JC, p. 166). His treatment of the question is abstract. We shall take from his discussion only his conclusions and definitions.

He states that "[t]he possibility of doubt, ...lies in consciousness, whose nature is a contradiction that is produced by a duplexity and that itself produces a duplexity" (JC, p. 168). In order to make sense of this, we must know that "contradiction" here does not denote anything of the nature of a paradox; rather, the term should be understood to mean a "meeting" or "contrast" -- in this case designating the contrast between reality, which is immediacy, and ideality, which is mediacy or language (*Ibid.*). "Ideality and reality therefore collide ...in consciousness -- there is the contradiction" (JC, p. 171). We need now to consider the first and second "duplexities" of this definition.

The first duplexity is that of immediacy, on the one hand, and language or mediacy on the other. "What, then, is immediacy? It is reality itself" (JC, p. 167). According to Climacus, a child's consciousness is immediate, which is to say that it possesses an unqualified consciousness, for a qualified consciousness is a related consciousness (*Ibid.*).

---

<sup>1</sup> "These three theses were as follows: (1) philosophy begins with doubt; (2) in order to philosophize, one must have doubted; (3) modern philosophy begins with doubt" (JC, p. 132).

For a child, then, doubt cannot arise, because doubt is contingent upon the question of untruth, which presupposes a relation of at least two different possibilities to be weighed in the balance of a prior interest<sup>1</sup> in the truth (*Ibid.*). "In immediacy there is no relation, for as soon as there is a relation, immediacy is canceled" (*Ibid.*). In other words, since "*immediacy* is precisely *indeterminateness*" (*Ibid.*), therefore, no question of any relation can arise in a consciousness locked in immediacy -- including the relation of any possibility to an interest in truth. "In immediacy, the most false and the most true are equally true; in immediacy, the most possible and the most impossible are equally actual" (JC, p. 168).

This peculiar description of immediate consciousness arises owing to an error in thinking; for, Climacus asserts, consciousness cannot remain in immediacy (JC, p. 167), so it is a mistake to speak of "immediate consciousness" with respect to the question of untruth (the possibility for doubt). "If consciousness can remain in immediacy, then the question of truth is canceled" (*Ibid.*).

The question of truth (and untruth) arises in the meeting of immediacy and mediacy, that is, in consciousness, which is qualified by interest. This is still quite dense, so we must step back to consider, in turn: mediacy, repetition, reflection, possibility, and interest. Here we

---

<sup>1</sup> "Prior" not in the sense of an earlier interest, but in the sense of a guiding or principal interest.

are still working to understand the first duplexity in Climacus's definition of consciousness.

Concerning the possibility of consciousness, mediacy overcomes the monopoly of immediacy "by *pre*-supposing it" (FC, p. 167). When language (mediacy) expresses something, thereby it presupposes that thing, regardless as to whether that thing is a feeling, an abstract concept, or a sensation. "Immediately there is no collision, but mediately it is present" (JC, p. 171).<sup>1</sup> Consciousness is present where reality (immediacy) and ideality (mediacy) meet.

Reality is not consciousness, ideality no more so. Yet consciousness does not exist without both, and this contradiction is the coming into existence of consciousness and is its nature (JC, p. 168).

Recognition, recollection, comparison and verbal expression each are functions of consciousness, for they demonstrate the meeting of reality and ideality. These

---

<sup>1</sup> Here we may resort to a simple example of the idea of representational mediacy. The word "pipe" is not a pipe, but in order for the word to mediate, a pipe in its immediate (real) sense must be assumed. Alternative theories of correspondence between language and experience are imagineable in this connection, but here we are concerned with Climacus's conception of the meeting of immediacy and mediacy in consciousness. Granted, Climacus entertains the idea of "this exchange [of ideality and reality] taking place without mutual contact" -- in this case it would hold for ideality as for immediacy, when considered as a sphere unto itself, that "everything is just as perfectly true" -- but, he asserts, it is "not until the moment that ideality is brought into relation with reality [that] possibility appear[s]". Our interest here is with possibility, insofar as, without it, no question of truth or untruth could arise meaningfully (passages from JC, p. 168).

activities are possible only mediately for, without ideality, unrelated reality cannot be determined. Climacus calls each mediate event a repetition.

When ideality and reality touch each other, then repetition occurs. When, for example, I see something in the moment, ideality enters in and will explain that it is a repetition. Here is the contradiction, for that which is, is also in another mode. That the external is, that I see, but in the same instant I bring it into relation with something that also is, something that is the same and that also will explain that the other is the same (JC, p. 171).

According to Climacus, "reflection is the possibility of [consciousness]" and "[c]onsciousness ...presupposes reflection" (JC, p. 169). He also asserts that "reflection's categories are always *dichotomous*" (*Ibid.*). Reflection is a function of the location of consciousness where reality and ideality meet. It provides consciousness with the objects of its interest, but reflection itself "is disinterested" (JC, p. 170), so it cannot dictate the direction of the individual's interest. The dichotomous product of reflection is precisely the possibility that consciousness, in its interest, can pursue a relation in the direction from ideality towards reality, or *vice versa* (see JC, p. 168).

For example, ideality and reality, soul and body, to know the true, to will the good, to love the beautiful, God and the world, etc. are categories of reflection. In reflection they touch each other in such a way that a relation becomes possible (JC, p. 169).

Each component of these various dichotomies must be understood mediately in reflection. Otherwise, there could

be no possibility of an interested (conscious) relation of them occurring; for, apart from "the word" (mediacy), there can be no determination of identity and no identification of a relation (see JC, p. 168).

Doubt is one possible direction for consciousness to pursue with respect to any category of reflection. In other words, doubt is a specific type of movement, or category, of consciousness. If consciousness and reflection were identical, then it would be impossible to explain the presence of interest in such conscious movements as doubt. Climacus indicates that, whereas the categories of reflection are dichotomous, "the categories of consciousness ...are trichotomous" (*Ibid.*).

If there were nothing but dichotomies, doubt would not exist, for the possibility of doubt resides precisely in the third, which places the two in relation to each other. We could not therefore say that reflection produces doubt, unless we would express ourselves in reverse; we must say that doubt *pre*-supposes reflection (JC, pp. 169-170).

The second duplexity of consciousness comes into view here: "I can either bring reality into relation with ideality or bring ideality into relation with reality" (JC, p. 168). Climacus makes this point respecting the directional dynamic of conscious interest with reference to the word itself. "Consciousness ...is the relation and thereby is interest, a duality that is perfectly and with pregnant double meaning expressed in the word "interest" (*interesse* [being between]) (JC, p. 170 [ed. brackets]). The point is, that reality and ideality come together in



consciousness, and the intermediate interest -- for example, an interest in truth, or a responsible interest in oneself -- decides the direction of the relation of the objects of reflection in consciousness, either from reality towards ideality or from ideality towards reality.

In a sketch for the book, we find a more precise discussion of these two possible directions for the conscious relation of ideality and reality, in terms of doubt. We shall consider first the movement that brings reality into relation to ideality and, second, the movement that brings ideality into relation to reality (JC supplement, p. 256; JP, #891).

The text states that the first of these movements "is the act of cognition" and, "insofar as interest is involved, there is at most a third in which I am interested -- for example, the truth" (*Ibid.*). Climacus observes that "all disinterested [objective] knowledge (mathematics, esthetics, metaphysics) is only the presupposition of doubt" (JC, p. 170 [brackets mine]). In other words, the question of the veracity of, for example, a particular metaphysical claim, does not arise from the claim itself; rather, the question is an individual's response to the claim, which arises out of her concern for identification, comparison and verification of the particular understanding. In immediacy, no question would arise and rival claims would present equally to the individual. In reflection, similarly, rival claims would present equally as possibilities to the

individual. The questioning individual inquires into the merit of the various claims with reference to her criteria for truth and untruth. Doubt only begins where interest in truth obtains and presupposes untruth, as a possibility, and "all systematic knowledge" (*Ibid.*). Climacus asserts: "From this it is apparent that doubt is the beginning of the highest form of existence, because it can have everything else as its presupposition" (*Ibid.*).

The second movement consists in "bringing ideality into relation with reality" and, the text asserts, "this is the ethical" (JC supplement, p. 256; JP, #891). We can understand the term "ethical" here in the same sense as we took it in chapter one, on the authorship; that is, the ethical pertains to a passionately appropriated conception of oneself, out of which one endeavours to live in a manner consistent with that conception.<sup>1</sup> Here the individual's interest is not directed to some unethical knowledge; rather, "that in which [she is] interested is [her]self" (*Ibid.*). In this movement, the individual relates her ideal of how she wills to be, to her actual (existent) self. Unlike the relation of cognition, in which the object of doubt is external to the individual, and in which the particular is related to the universal (see JC supplement, p. 257), the ethical relation of doubt emphasizes the self

---

<sup>1</sup> "Ethical" should be understood in this sense throughout the authorship, except for Fear and Trembling, where the term denotes social morality.

out of responsible self-interest, and aims to relate an ideal standard of good to the particular individual.<sup>1</sup>

In a stricter sense, doubt is the beginning of the ethical, for as soon as I am to act, the interest lies with me inasmuch as I assume the responsibility and thereby acquire significance (JC supplement, p. 265; JP, #891).

From another sketch for the final work, we see that a free "act of will" motivates the interest in any movement of doubt (*Ibid.*). It is important to note that this act of will is predicated upon freedom.

In freedom I can emerge only from that into which I have entered in freedom or in doubt I must be presupposed to have entered. If I am going to emerge from doubt in freedom, I must have entered doubt in freedom (*Ibid.*).

This passage leads us back to the main text, fragmentary as it is, to consider the higher conscious state one can enter from doubt in freedom.

Early in his inquiry into doubt's ideal possibility in consciousness, Climacus observes a "paradoxical dialectic" (JC, p. 166) between the possibilities of doubt and faith, which, he asserts, becomes apparent where an empirical basis for doubt is sought.

---

<sup>1</sup> If the individual in question lacks a religious consciousness of the transcendence of the good, then her "ethical" concern might denote an immanent sense of righteousness on her part; this serves simply to point up the possible overlap in the meaning of the term "ethical." The important point here is simply that "the ethical," in its fundamental sense, should be understood to encompass, qualitatively, "the ethical in the sense of social morality."

[N]ot only could that which evokes doubt in the single individual be extremely different, but it could also be the opposite, for if someone were to discourse on doubt in order to arouse doubt in another, he could precisely thereby evoke faith, just as faith, conversely, could evoke doubt (*Ibid.*).

The tension here is double: first, the hearer of the discourse on doubt might be persuaded; in this way conviction (belief) would follow, paradoxically, upon an admonition to precisely the contrary. Second, the admonition to doubt in the discourse might meet with the hearer's prior belief to the contrary, either with reference to any specifically identified object for doubt, or as over against the normativity of the axiom itself: "everything must be doubted".<sup>1</sup>

This latter tension can be understood to be paradoxical with respect to the possibility for the collision of the two parties' respective conclusions; however, insofar as both interests are guided willfully in freedom, it is possible also to concede here a merely relative tension (as opposed to a paradoxical one), assuming, for example, that neither freedom nor will implies anything beyond self-reflective finite understanding.

Climacus makes reference to the Greek skeptics, who, understanding the nature of doubt aright, did not attempt to overcome it by means of attaining certain objective knowledge (which, as noted above, is simply the

---

<sup>1</sup> That is: *De omnibus dubitandum est.*

presupposition of doubt), but rather sought to annul it "by transforming interest into apathy" (JC, p. 170). This movement is not qualitatively different from that of Climacus's contemporary "systematizers" (Hegelians), who claimed doubt was something to be overcome in the interest of the enterprise of philosophy, and who sought to do so by overleaping faith in a bid for certain knowledge (see JC supplement, p. 256). Both movements avoid the ethical interest: the first by denying the characteristic interest inherent to doubt through torpor; the second by joining cognitive interest with an exaggerated understanding of the bounds of human intellect. Climacus posits faith as the only free and willful movement of consciousness that overcomes doubt, in its ethical determination, by presupposing it.

[I]t is really Christianity that has brought this [ethical] doubt into the world, for in Christianity [the ethical] self received its meaning. -- Doubt is conquered not by the system but by faith, just as it is faith that has brought doubt into the world (JC supplement, p. 256).

Before we move on to Climacus's two published works, we can note in *Johannes Climacus* the observation that "[w]onder is plainly an immediate category and involves no reflection upon itself" (JC, p. 145). This precludes, in our discussion of faith as a movement of consciousness, any consideration that would describe an individual's movement of faith in immediate continuity with her world. In this

respect, Climacus and de Silentio agree that faith cannot be "the first immediacy" in human consciousness.

Philosophical Fragments and the Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments<sup>1</sup> are both *experiments* on Climacus's part. That is to say, they are hypothetical inquiries only and make no pretense to presenting an authoritative treatment of their subject.

[L]et no one therefore take the pains to appeal to [the book] as an authority; for he who thus appeals to it has *eo ipso* misunderstood it . . . I have no opinion except the one, that it must be the most difficult of all things to become a Christian, which opinion is no opinion and possesses none of the qualities which usually characterize an "opinion"; for it does not flatter me, since I do not give myself out to be a Christian; it does not affront the Christian, since he cannot object if I regard as the most difficult thing that which he did and is doing; it does not affront the adversary of Christianity, since his triumph becomes all the greater, seeing that he goes further . . . than that which is the most difficult thing of all. I am consistent in desiring no factual proof that I really have an opinion -- no adherent, no hurrah, no public execution, etc. -- for I have no opinion and wish to have none, being content and delighted with things as they are (CP, pp. 546, 547).

Besides the two books, we have an unpublished letter by Climacus, which he wrote in response to a pseudonymous essay entitled: *Is Faith a Paradox and "by Virtue of the Absurd," a Question Prompted by "Fear and Trembling" by Johannes de Silentio, Answered with the Help of the*

---

<sup>1</sup> Judging from their titles, it is obvious that these two books belong together. The latter work recapitulates and develops further the idea of the former, namely, to explicate the nature of an individual's relationship to "the truth," first under the rubric of Socratic thought and, second, under the terms of Christianity.

*Confidential Communications of a Knight of Faith, for the Mutual Edification of Jews, Christians, and Moslems, by the Above-mentioned Knight of Faith's Brother, Theophilus Nicolaus.*<sup>1</sup> Nicolaus's essay addressed de Silentio's and Climacus's work, and Climacus's critical response serves to clarify his view concerning the category of the absurd vis-a-vis human understanding in faith. We will return to this piece later. Here we shall investigate his two published works.

Following his *Preface*, Climacus begins Philosophical Fragments with the question: "Can the truth be learned?" (PF, p. 9). He observes that this question immediately raises the following Socratic problem:

A person cannot possibly seek what he knows, and, just as impossibly, he cannot seek what he does not know, for what he knows he cannot seek, since he knows it, and what he does not know he cannot seek, because, after all, he does not even know what he is supposed to seek (*Ibid.*).

Climacus notes that Socrates did away with this problem by assuming that each individual already has the truth within herself. He explains that Socrates accomplished this with reference to the idea of the immortality of the soul.<sup>2</sup> In his relations with others,

---

<sup>1</sup> The pseudonym belonged to Magnus Eiriksson (see JP v.6, note 2707).

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1 on the authorship for this discussion. See also farther in this section on Climacus's comparison of the Socratic and Christian views.

this understanding led Socrates to pursue the truth only along maieutic lines.<sup>1</sup> Maieutic communication presumes recollection to be the only path to knowledge that is open to human beings. For any positive seeking after the truth, that attends to the idea that knowledge must be transferred from person to person, leads back to the problem: how is an individual to be certain whether her inquiry will lead her to knowledge of the truth, where the truth is considered to be something external to and separate from her?

With half-thoughts, with higgling and haggling, with claiming and disclaiming, as if the individual to a certain degree owed something to another person but then again to a certain degree did not, with vague words that explain everything except what is meant by this "to a certain degree" -- with all such things one does not go beyond Socrates or reach the concept of revelation, either, but simply remains in empty talk (PF, p. 11).

According to the Socratic anthropology, every person possesses the truth. Therefore, the truth, as much as coming to know it, is a matter of subjective interest -- it is a matter of coming to know oneself.

In the Socratic view, every human being is himself the midpoint, and the whole world focuses only on him because his self-knowledge is God-knowledge. Moreover, this is how

---

<sup>1</sup> "This is the profundity of Socratic thinking, this his noble, thoroughgoing humanity, which does not exclusively and conceitedly cultivate the company of brilliant minds but feels just as kin to a tanner, and for that reason he soon 'became convinced that the study of nature is not man's concern and therefore began to philosophize about the ethical in workshops and in the marketplace' (Diogenes Laertius, II, V, 21) but philosophized just as absolutely with whomever he spoke" (PF, p. 11).



Socrates understood himself, and in his view this is how every human being must understand himself, and by virtue of that understanding he must understand his relation to the single individual, always with equal humility and with equal pride. For that purpose, Socrates had the courage and self-collectedness to be sufficient unto himself, but in his relations to others he also had the courage and self-collectedness to be merely an occasion even for the most stupid person (*Ibid.*).

In both Fragments and Postscript, Climacus sets up a comparison between the Socratic and the Christian emphases upon subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> The ostensibly experimental aim of Fragments was to establish the nature of, and possibility for an approach to truth which could go beyond the Socratic view. The Postscript continued in the same vein and went further to speak explicitly of Christianity as presenting such an approach to truth.

---

<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, Climacus repeatedly insists on the absolute difference between the Socratic and the Christian positions; on the other hand, he assumes that a comparison between the two can be carried out meaningfully. The basis for his drawing the comparison rests in his anthropology. Put concisely, his view is that each human being is a synthesis of the eternal and the temporal, of the infinite and the finite. On the one hand, this description of human nature explains the seeming boundlessness of human imagination and of our wondering pursuit of the divine; on the other hand, it also accounts for the frustrations and errors any individual encounters in that endeavour. This anthropology is not the focus of our discussion at this point. However, once we come to address Johannes Anti-Climacus's work, we shall see more clearly how this anthropology (which the two pseudonymous authors share) contributes to the discussion of the relation between reason and faith. I mention it here only by way of explaining the basis for Climacus's comparative discussion of the Socratic and Christian views. We should note that Climacus's distinction between subjective and objective knowledge, which shapes much of the discussion in Postscript, derives from the nature of the relationship between individual human beings and the eternal truth, which his anthropology posits.

Climacus pursues many lines of thought in these books. For this reason it is difficult to isolate the development of ideas related to our topic. In order to maintain a clear focus on the ideas we must address, we should bear in mind *The Moral*<sup>1</sup> that brings Fragments to a close. It constitutes a bridge between the two published works and legitimates our moving back and forth between them, in our attempt to understand Climacus's treatment of reason and faith. By virtue of the fact that the unpublished *Johannes Climacus* deals with some thoughts essentially related to the topic, albeit through the distance of narrative, we shall assume the treatment of consciousness in it as necessary and complementary background to this discussion.

According to the terms of that first book, we can clearly recognize that the Socratic interest in truth is a type of conscious movement. For there is interest present in the individual's self-reflection, and this frees the Socratic idea from the sphere of immediacy. Of the two

---

<sup>1</sup> "THE MORAL

This project indisputably goes beyond the Socratic, as is apparent at every point. Whether it is therefore more true than the Socratic is an altogether different question, one that cannot be decided in the same breath, inasmuch as a new organ has been assumed here: faith; and a new presupposition: the consciousness of sin; and a new decision: the moment; and a new teacher: the god in time. Without these, I really would not have dared to present myself for inspection before that ironist who has been admired for millenia, whom I approach with as much ardent enthusiasm as anyone. But to go beyond Socrates when one nevertheless says essentially the same as he, only not nearly so well -- that, at least, is not Socratic."

possible directions for conscious reflection to pursue, that which relates ideality to reality,<sup>1</sup> proves to be the more important in Climacus's analysis of Socrates and Christianity.

As we shall see, this is the case because both Socrates and Christianity presume to treat the topic of any individual's personal relationship to the truth, as this relationship bears on her eternal happiness. By definition, this is a topic of greater personal than impersonal interest, for it concerns the idea of infinite self-consistency, through the individual's consideration of her relationship to the eternal truth.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, we can recognize in this idea an implicit reference to the ethical orbit. Here we must consider the difference Climacus outlines between *subjective* and *objective* truth. The outline of the Postscript makes clear the significance of this distinction in his work.

Climacus divided the Postscript into two parts: *Book One*, which considers *The Objective Problem Concerning*

---

<sup>1</sup> That is, the movement taken by any ethically concerned consciousness.

<sup>2</sup> This is borne out by the personal passionate nature of the alternative responses to the proclaimed idea of an eternal happiness, namely: doubt and belief. See also CP, p. 280: "All knowledge about reality is possibility. The only reality to which an existing individual may have a relation that is more than cognitive, is his own reality, the fact that he exists; this reality constitutes his absolute interest. Abstract thought requires him to become disinterested in order to acquire knowledge; the ethical demand is that he become infinitely interested in existing."

*the Truth of Christianity*, and *Book Two*, which he entitled *The Subjective Problem: The Relation of the Subject to the Truth of Christianity -- The Problem of Becoming a Christian*.

The objective inquiry into the truth of Christianity can follow two paths: it can seek to establish the historical truth of the claims of Christianity, and it can seek to establish the philosophical truth of Christianity.

Viewed as historical, the truth of Christianity must be determined through a critical examination of the various sources, and so forth; in short, in the same manner that historical truth generally is determined. When the question of the philosophical truth is raised, the object is to determine the relationship of the doctrine thus historically given and verified, to the eternal truth (CP, p. 23).

Climacus concedes that questions of truth are raised in choosing either objective path. However, he asserts that in neither case does the inquirer "raise the question of a subjective truth, the truth of appropriation and assimilation" (*Ibid.*).

So we see that an individual can approach Christianity in either of two ways: either she can seek to ascertain its truth in terms indifferent to her ethical sensibilities (the objective approach), or she can approach Christianity out of a passionate interest in herself (the subjective approach), in which case she is concerned to establish whether she is in a proper relationship to it. In the former case, the nature of her personal existence is not brought into question. The objective interest precludes

such considerations, except insofar as it requires an existent thinker to pursue its goals.<sup>1</sup> In the latter case, her concern is for herself in relation to those aspects of Christianity which lay claim to her interest in herself. Climacus calls the knowledge that is sought in this way -- that is, subjectively -- *essential knowledge*.

All essential knowledge relates to existence, or only such knowledge as has an essential relationship to existence is essential knowledge. All knowledge which does not inwardly relate itself to existence, in the reflection of inwardness, is, essentially viewed, accidental knowledge; its degree and scope is essentially indifferent. That essential knowledge is essentially related to existence ...means that knowledge has a relationship to the knower, who is essentially an existing individual, and for this reason all essential knowledge is essentially related to existence. Only ethical and ethico-religious knowledge has an essential relationship to the knower (CP, pp. 176-177).

Conversely, any individual's inquiry into objective truth makes of any subjective concern on her part at most only an accidental interest, if not decrying it as positively detrimental to the objective enterprise.

The way of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and thereby transforms existence into something indifferent, something vanishing. Away from the subject the objective way of reflection leads to the objective truth,

---

<sup>1</sup> In terms of Climacus's discussion of the movements of consciousness, the pursuit of the objective truth is a movement which relates reality to ideality, that is, the movement of cognition. See also CP, p. 280: "The only reality that exists for an existing individual is his own ethical reality. To every other reality he stands in a cognitive relation..." Throughout his Postscript, Climacus ridicules thinkers who "forget" the fact of their particular existence and thereby win for themselves an ethically irresponsible sense of confidence.

and while the subject and his subjectivity become indifferent, the truth also becomes indifferent, and this indifference is precisely its objective validity; for all interest, like all decisiveness, is rooted in subjectivity. The way of objective reflection leads to abstract thought, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of different kinds; and always it leads away from the subject, whose existence or non-existence, and from the objective point of view quite rightly, becomes infinitely indifferent. Quite rightly, since as Hamlet says, existence and non-existence have only subjective significance (CP, p. 173).

Here we turn to Climacus's comparison of the Socratic and Christian understandings of the human pursuit of truth.

We have already noted how Socrates eliminated the problem of seeking the truth outside of oneself, by understanding that the truth is eternally possessed by every individual, and how he based his claim upon the idea that each person has an eternal soul, which is continuous.<sup>1</sup> The knowledge that the soul possesses through eternal contact with itself, which can be expressed temporally through an infinite array of incarnate experiences, makes of the soul itself a repository of truth.

Here we can see that *the truth* is whatever is the truth for the particular individual. The subject's relation to the truth is the subject's relation to herself; this

---

<sup>1</sup> This is an important characterization, for it means that recollection is not to be understood in the sense that one must try to remember the details of past incarnations in order to recollect the truth. For the accidentals of learning events -- the circumstances of particular movements of recollection -- are not of essential interest. (See PF, p. 10 note\*.)

affirmative relation is essentially closed. In other words, any external occasion for her inward reflection, such as would a conversation with Socrates comprise, can serve only to prompt her movement of reflection where interest is already present. But the interest, which guides reflection, lies with the individual herself, and, apart from her interest, no one and nothing has control of her reflection, or of its consequences.

Let us consider this a little more thoroughly. In the words quoted above, we read where Climacus states: "all interest, like all decisiveness, is rooted in subjectivity" (CP, p. 173). Here we should note another important definition: "subjectivity is essentially passion" (CP, p. 33). If we recall to mind the Socratic assertions that knowledge is virtue and that the knowledgeable soul is immortal, and link these two ideas to a hypothetical individual, whose desire to know the truth is alive and potent within her, then we can see that she would enjoy the maximum of subjective passion in relation to her ethical sensibilities. For the conclusions of geometry and history -- eternally true as they may be in their own spheres -- can offer nothing comparable in earnest compulsion to her desire to know the ethical good in herself and thereby come to reflect in her life the pattern of virtue, which knowledge of the Good would insist upon.

By Climacus's definition, above, her passionate attraction to the essential truth is personal. By Socratic

definition, she *is* the truth, and not only does she seek the truth within herself by her passion, but also, by it she aims to realize the Good in her existence. To introduce an important term here -- one which recurs in Climacus's discussion -- we may note that, insofar as the individual is concerned ethically with herself, her interest is *infinite* and personal. We must understand this description in the sense that her interest is in the direction of her own eternal happiness. This happiness is *eternal* by virtue of its correspondence with the Good, which is eternal, and her desire is to be *happy* eternally, for happiness corresponds to the knowledge of virtue, which corresponds to the Good, which is eternal.

We must bear in mind that, like Socrates, our hypothetical individual could outwardly reflect her knowledge of the truth only negatively, that is, explicitly as a movement of ignorance. On this point, we may consider Socrates's interrogation of Meno's slave boy.<sup>1</sup> The apparent forward movement of that part of the dialogue is nothing but an uncovering of what the slave already knew. Socrates asks questions, as if he were actually ignorant of the matter himself, in order to demonstrate that his role in the conversation is merely accidental; he does not provide the slave with any direct answers.

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Meno*, 82 b - 86 c.



Socrates does not presume to teach the boy, simply because he *cannot* do so. Granted, he might have feigned the role of 'teacher' by laying before his 'pupil' those axioms of geometry appropriate to solving the puzzle; but the lesson he gave instead was a lesson in maieutic instruction, which proved the alternative form for education not only unnecessary, but also highly suspect. Similarly, our hypothetical individual's seeking after truth would lead her only into herself, not into a directly progressive relation with others.

Here we should recall a distinction made in the first chapter of this thesis; that is: the Socratic movement is backwards in recollection.<sup>1</sup> The eternal is present to the individual in its past continuity. The existing individual ages, of course, and in that sense her temporal existence is a forward movement. But the knowledge of the truth of her ethical existence requires of her a passionate movement away from her concrete self, towards her eternal self -- towards her continuously past knowledge of the Good. This explains the ironic distance Socrates maintained between himself and anyone who sought to learn the truth from him. For he could not presume to portray through his life, which he lived forwards in time, any identity with the Good. This was so, simply because he was

---

<sup>1</sup> For elaboration on this dynamic, see Climacus's discussion of the individual's guilt, which is implicit to the attempt -- under the Socratic rubric -- to recollect the ethical truth in time, CP, pp. 469-470.

persuaded that he could reach the Good only through recollection and, therefore, could only hope to *reflect* it in his life. (and a reflection is a negative image).

Just as Socrates would not produce the fruit of his thought in such a way as to teach directly what he knew of the Good, so too our seeking individual could not hope to teach the practise of virtue positively -- certainly not and maintain Socratic integrity. For virtue, by its correspondence with knowledge of the Good, cannot be taught; it can only be recollected. Socratically understood, then, education in virtue is ever only personal and inward.

What can we observe about our hypothetical individual's response to her conversation with Socrates? We can see that nothing Socrates could say to her would necessarily convey ethical truth or untruth to her; for whatever would constitute that kind of truth for her, would be truth for her alone. Any correspondence between Socrates's positive intent, even were he only ironically to have possessed one in speaking with her, and her appropriated sense of knowledge derived from the conversation, to Socrates would be only a matter of indifferent coincidence. Otherwise he would be of essential importance in the education of our subject, and that would contradict the idea of maieutic communication.<sup>1</sup> So, there

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course, if a third party were interested in this correspondence, her interest would be inappropriate, given that it could only lead her away from her own ethical existence, into speculation.

could be nothing directly essential in what he might say to her that would lead her necessarily in the direction of either appropriation or misappropriation of the truth.

Let us consider an example of something Socrates might say to her: "I do not know that I could make it plain to you, my friend, that I am immortal; but I am not willing to deny my immortality on that premise." Reflecting upon that statement, our subject could pursue either an objective or subjective line of thought, depending entirely upon her passion. The former would require of her indifference respecting her personal existence, for abstract thought moves in the realm of possibility, which is the antithesis of any ethical existence.<sup>1</sup> Her objective interest would mean her subjective indecision. In other words, her concern for herself would not enter into the inquiry. "As soon as subjectivity is eliminated, and passion eliminated from subjectivity, and the infinite interest eliminated from passion, there is in general no decision at all..." (CP, p. 33). But the latter would preclude such indifference, for the subjective pursuit of the question of immortality would be of decisive interest to her. "[D]ecisiveness inheres in subjectivity alone, essentially in its passion, and maximally in the personal passion which is infinitely interested in an eternal happiness" (CP, p. 35).

---

<sup>1</sup> On this point, see Climacus's discussion of the relation between the ethical and the possible, CP, pp. 283-287.

As we have already noted, our individual's interested response to Socrates's statement would depend upon her own interest. Her interest would determine for her whether the idea of personal immortality be true. Bearing in mind Climacus's earlier treatment of consciousness, we must recognize that reflection could not itself lead her to make a movement of consciousness, either affirming or denying Socrates's claim.<sup>1</sup>

Where her interest in the truth is second to her desire never to be deceived, she will doubt the veracity of the statement, and her doubt will presuppose whatever ideas she chooses to consider. This does not mean that she would assert the opposite as true. Her doubt is not a conclusion of reflection. There can be no conclusion made in reflection alone and, of greater importance here: doubt is not a cognitive act; it is an ethical act. Her doubt arises as the result of her interest in never being deceived. Doubt can suspend the convictions of belief and disbelief, simply by continually weighing opposing possibilities equally in reflection. Without an overriding interest in her eternal happiness, to prompt her reflection in favour of either possibility, her desire to avoid deception will lead

---

<sup>1</sup> Recall that Climacus drew a distinction between reflection, whose constituent components are dichotomous, and consciousness, whose movements comprise the elements of reflection as well as interest, and which does with the content of reflection whatever it will.

her to avoid any claim to knowledge of the truth.<sup>1</sup> We must recall here that 'truth' denotes only that which to her is the truth, as a consequence of her prior interest in it. Again, we should understand that her doubt is not based upon reflection or cognition.<sup>2</sup>

The doubter, for example, does not deny his own existence, but he draws no conclusions, for he does not want to be deceived. Insofar as he uses dialectics in continually making the opposite equally probable, he does not erect his skepticism on dialectical arguments, which are nothing more than outer fortifications, human accommodations; therefore he has no results, not even negative ones (for this would mean the acknowledgement of knowledge), but by the power of

---

<sup>1</sup> Concerning this understanding of doubt in Greek skepticism, see PF, pp. 82-83. Concerning the impossibility of continuous doubt, see CP, p. 299 note.

<sup>2</sup> Here we may consider Climacus's treatment of the Cartesian axiom "I think, therefore I am" vis-a-vis subjective and objective interest: "The real subject is not the cognitive subject, since in knowing he moves in the sphere of the possible; the real subject is the ethically existing subject. An abstract thinker exists to be sure, but this fact is rather a satire on him than otherwise. For an abstract thinker to try to prove his existence by the fact that he thinks, is a curious contradiction; for in the degree that he thinks abstractly he abstracts from his own existence. In so far his existence is revealed as a presupposition from which he seeks emancipation; but the act of abstraction nevertheless becomes a strange sort of proof for his existence, since if it succeeded entirely his existence would cease. The Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* has often been repeated. If the 'I' which is the subject of *cogito* means an individual human being, the proposition proves nothing: 'I am thinking, *ergo* I am; but if I *am* thinking what wonder that I *am*:' the assertion has already been made, and the first proposition says even more than the second. But if the 'I' in *cogito* is interpreted as meaning a particular existing human being, philosophy cries: 'How silly; here there is no question of your self or my self, but solely of the pure ego.' But this pure ego cannot very well have any other than a purely conceptual existence; what then does the *ergo* mean? There is no conclusion here, for the proposition is a tautology" (CP, p. 281).

the will he decides to restrain himself and hold himself back ...from any conclusion (PF, pp. 84-85).

Just as the persistent passionate determination to doubt can exclude from consciousness the convictions of belief and disbelief, the reverse is also possible. That is, where her interest in her eternal happiness, through coming to knowledge of the truth, is prior to her desire not to be deceived (which latter interest is the same as possessing a desire never to know the truth), the individual's belief or disbelief of Socrates's assertion dispels doubt. Like doubt, belief does not follow directly upon reflection, nor is it a cognitive act. Like a doubter, a believer can utilize the content of her reflection to suit her own conscious desire. "The conclusion of belief [or disbelief, which is the same thing] is no conclusion but a resolution, and thus doubt is excluded" (PF, p. 84 [brackets mine]).

Climacus sums up these points as follows:

Belief and doubt are not two kinds of knowledge that can be defined in continuity with each other, for neither of them is a cognitive act, and they are opposite passions. Belief is a sense for coming into existence, and doubt is a protest against any conclusion that wants to go beyond immediate sensation and immediate knowledge (*Ibid.*).

By virtue of the universality of his anthropology and conception of human consciousness, Climacus's discussion of interest, doubt and belief bears equally upon both the Socratic and Christian views of human relations to the truth. Before we move on to win a clear understanding of

the difference between these two views, which is necessary background to Climacus's discussion of Christian faith, we must consider his use of the term *paradox* in connection with subjective truth. In order to understand the intended sense of this word, we must return to his differentiation of subjective and objective knowledge. This will illuminate for us the relation between heightened passion and qualitatively greater paradoxes of human understanding -- which relation is at the heart of his discussion of the difference between the Socratic position and Christianity.

The first step in the following analysis, then, will be for us to recognize why an individual's passion is heightened in relation to her concern, for example, about her own immortality, in contrast to her concern, for example, to prove the Pythagorean theorem for right-angled triangles. This will establish in our minds the interrelation of subjective interest, passion and the paradoxical nature of ethical truth. The second step in our treatment will be to point to the difference in paradoxical tension between Socratic and Christian subjectivity. Once we have done that, we shall proceed to present Climacus's characterization of faith in Christianity and, with reference to the terms of *The Moral of Fragments*, complete this treatment of Climacus's view with the conclusions of his letter to Theophilus Nicolaus about faith and the category of the absurd (which is a category of reason vis-a-vis the passion of faith).

We begin our discussion of increased degrees of passion with Climacus's description of the individual's development of her subjectivity:

[T]he development of the subject consists precisely in his active interpenetration of himself by reflection concerning his own existence, so that he really thinks what he thinks through making a reality of it. He does not for example think, for the space of a passing moment: "Now you must attend to this thought every moment"; but he really does attend to it every moment. Here then everything becomes more and more subjective, as is quite natural when the task is to develop the subjectivity of the individual (CP, p. 151).

Obviously, the individual's concern for the Pythagorean proof cannot be made real in the same sense as can her concern to relate to herself and others in the light of the knowledge that truth resides in each individual. Engaging herself with the proof, she has not essentially to do with herself. It is otherwise with the truth about herself as she has to realize it herself. The truth of herself, in the Socratic sense, is the truth for which she alone is responsible. Or, to view the difference from another vantage, her immortality is not something that Socrates could demonstrate for her in the same way that he might demonstrate the proof of the Pythagorean equation.

Climacus explains that the qualitatively greater passion with which she wrestles with her ethical sense, is a direct reflection of the objective uncertainty of the truth of her ethical responsibility. In the case of the proof of the theorem, *what* the individual says of it is of greatest importance -- that is: does she get it right? In the case



of the proof of her own immortality, *how* the individual relates herself to that interest is of greatest significance -- that is: with what degree of passion does she concern herself with the question? This difference reflects clearly that between objective and subjective truth.

*The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective accent on HOW it is said. ...But this is not to be understood as referring to demeanor, expression, or the like; rather it refers to the relationship sustained by the existing individual, in his own existence, to the content of his utterance. Objectively the interest is focussed merely on the thought-content, subjectively on the inwardness (CP, p. 181).*

Recalling Climacus's definition of essential knowledge, we can note that the interest attaching to the Pythagorean theorem makes of the interested subject something merely accidental; it is of no essential concern to the individual whether she acknowledges it. It is otherwise with the claim of personal immortality, because here the interest lies with the existing individual herself. Climacus argues that the reason why the individual sustains her passion in relation to the truth of her immortality is simply that, as she is an individual who exists in time, the

how of her relation to herself becomes a recurrent issue.<sup>1</sup>  
 She cannot once for all decide that she is immortal and that she possesses the truth within herself and with that resolution put her ethical sensibilities to rest.

Every subject is an existing subject, which should receive an essential expression in all his knowledge. Particularly it must be expressed through the prevention of an illusory finality, whether in perceptual certainty, or in historical knowledge, or in illusory speculative results (CP, p. 75).

On the other hand, her assurance about the Pythagorean theorem possesses the continuity of subjective indifference. Once proven, the proof does not return to assail her with misgivings about how she is related to it.

In a distinction he draws between Socrates and Plato, Climacus makes it plain that an individual can objectify what, essentially considered, ought to be pursued only with subjective interest. He accuses Plato of poetizing Socrates, by which treatment Plato comes to regard Socratic ignorance, with its related convictions, merely as a doctrine -- as if it were an objective concept, through

---

<sup>1</sup> See CP p. 182: "But the 'how' which is thus subjectively accentuated precisely because the subject is an existing individual, is also subject to a dialectic with respect to time. In the passionate moment of decision, where the road swings away from objective knowledge, it seems as if the infinite decision were thereby realized. But in the same moment the existing individual finds himself in the temporal order, and the subjective 'how' is transformed into a striving, a striving which receives indeed its impulse and a repeated renewal from the decisive passion of the infinite, but is nevertheless a striving." Note that this point reflects the same tension between the individual's temporal existence and her sense of guilt in the face of the recollective path to the truth.

which he has no essential relation to himself.<sup>1</sup> Even if we acknowledge Plato's relation to Socrates's convictions as being passionate, nevertheless we must recognize that the object of his passion is apparently not so much himself as it is the doctrine. By relating himself to the idea in that way, Plato commits the error of forgetting that the doctrine has essentially to do with him. Climacus states that there is an 'existential parting of the ways,' respecting the two possible pursuits of the truth, where Socrates leaves off speculation upon the possibility of immortality and chooses rather to live in accordance with the implications the idea holds for him. Plato chooses the other road and immerses himself in abstract speculations upon nature and politics. By the term 'existential,' Climacus means simply to emphasize that Plato was not himself committed to reflect the idea of Socratic ignorance in his own life in the same

---

<sup>1</sup> Here we should note that Climacus is open to the same charge respecting his experimental treatment of Christianity. We may observe also that Climacus condemns finger-pointing in the sphere of the ethical on the basis that, in the ethical sphere, each individual has only to do with herself. See, for example, his discussion of the relation between the real and the possible in the ethical sphere, as this bears on the ethical relation between individuals: see esp. CP, pp. 285, 287 middle paragraphs.

way that Socrates had been; that is, with the earnest inwardness of subjective passion.<sup>1</sup>

Climacus identifies the paradox of subjective truth with this juncture between it and objective truth. In a sense the truth is rent in two here: the objective truth lies separated from the subjective truth by the space of passion.<sup>2</sup> From the standpoint of the existing individual, the greater her passion, the broader the gulf between the assuredness of the two truths. This tension becomes clear

---

<sup>1</sup> "Socratically the eternal essential truth is by no means in its own nature paradoxical, but only in its relationship to an existing individual. This finds expression in another Socratic proposition, namely, that all knowledge is recollection. This proposition is not for Socrates a cue to the speculative enterprise, and hence he does not follow it up; essentially it becomes a Platonic principle. Here the way swings off; Socrates concentrates essentially upon accentuating existence, while Plato forgets this and loses himself in speculation. Socrates' infinite merit is to have been an *existing* thinker, not a speculative philosopher who forgets what it means to exist. ...[In the Fragments] I carried the Socratic back to the principle that all knowledge is recollection. This is, in a way, commonly assumed, and only one who with a specialized interest concerns himself with the Socratic, returning again and again to the sources, only for him would it be of importance on this point to distinguish between Socrates and Plato. The proposition does indeed belong to both, only that Socrates is always departing from it, in order to exist. ...To accentuate existence, which also involves the qualification of inwardness, is the Socratic position; the Platonic tendency, on the other hand, is to pursue the lure of recollection and immanence" (CP, p. 184 and note pp. 184-185).

<sup>2</sup> Here the reader may consider Climacus's discussion of the nature of a true demonstration for the existence of the god, which develops from conviction (which is a passion) and not from any objective ground. That is, since the idea of the god's being for the existing individual has primarily an ethical dimension, therefore, only a subjective relation to the idea can sustain it as true. (See PF pp. 39-45.)

where Climacus once again delineates the two spheres of truth:

*When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focussed upon the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true (CP, p. 178).*

This expression clarifies the peculiarity of subjective truth; that is, that "[i]t is the passion of the infinite that is the decisive factor and not its content, for its content is precisely itself" (CP, p. 181). Here we are reminded of the conclusion of the Socratic view: that the truth is whatever is the truth for the individual, as a result of her passionate interest.<sup>1</sup> This understanding of what constitutes truth is antithetical to the idea of the objective truth. Climacus does not shrink from presenting this contrast in the boldest of terms (religiously considered).

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course it is important to remember that the Socratic view is predicated upon the idea of the soul's grasp of the truth. We shall see how Christianity sustains the link between the individual's infinite passion and the idea of subjective truth while it dispenses with the notion of an eternal continuity obtaining between the individual and the eternal truth. It does this by recognizing Christ as the middle term, in time, between an individual's passion for being in the truth and the impossibility of that relation arising by way of the individual's own efforts.

Now when the problem is to reckon up on which side there is most truth, whether on the side of one who seeks the true God objectively, and pursues the approximate truth of the God-idea; or on the side of one who, driven by the infinite passion of his need of God, feels an infinite concern for his own relationship to God in truth: the answer cannot be in doubt for anyone who has not been demoralized with the aid of science. If one who lives in the midst of Christendom goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a false spirit; and one who lives in an idolatrous community prays with the entire passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is there most truth? The one prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol (CP, pp. 179-180).

In the case of any ethico-religious interest, then, we can see that Climacus prefers passionate decisiveness to objective certainty when it comes to a determination of the truth. In the Postscript, he provides a definition of the truth which takes into account this tension between objective and subjective knowledge:

*An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual. At the point where the way swings off (and where this is cannot be specified objectively, since it is a matter of subjectivity), there objective knowledge is placed in abeyance. Thus the subject merely has, objectively, the uncertainty; but it is this which precisely increases the tension of that infinite passion which constitutes his inwardness. The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite (CP, p. 182).*

We should note also that Climacus equates this definition of truth with the meaning of faith:

But the above definition of truth is an equivalent expression for faith. Without risk there is no faith.

Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe. If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith (*Ibid.*).

It follows from this equation that, just as the truth -- subjectively understood -- is paradoxical, so too faith itself is paradoxical. But, when we consider this identity in relation to *The Moral of Fragments*, the equation raises the question whether faith is "a new organ" uniquely belonging to Christianity.

Given our present understanding of subjective truth, we should recognize that any truth-appropriation of greater passion than the Socratic makes that appropriation more true. In this way, faith and truth together come to be linked with this highest subjective appropriation. Here we move to consider the possibility for a relationship to the truth, which involves greater passion on the part of the individual, than the relationship to the truth which the Socratic view presents. In order to work from a simple articulation of the Socratic position, we will bear in mind the following:

*In the principle that subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth, there is comprehended the Socratic wisdom, whose everlasting merit it was to have become aware of the essential significance of existence, of the fact that the knower is an existing individual. The Socratic ignorance gives expression to the objective uncertainty attaching to the truth, while his inwardness in existing is the truth (CP, p. 183 [italics mine]).*

In contrast to this conception, Climacus observes that there is an expression for the individual's relation to the truth, which would involve a greater degree of passion on her part.

Subjectivity, inwardness, has been posited as the truth; can any expression for the truth be found which has a still higher degree of inwardness? Aye, there is such an expression, provided the principle that subjectivity or inwardness is the truth begins by positing the opposite principle: that subjectivity is untruth (CP, p. 185).

This construal places the (subjective) truth outside the individual. But, if she is untruth, then the truth is absolutely different from her and she cannot identify it positively. And, it follows, her untruth is not something that she can come to know immanently as true. Both the situation of her own untruth and the reality of the truth, which points up her untruth, are unknown to her.

Climacus argues that, by definition, the understanding cannot positively grasp the 'unknown.' But, he asserts, the understanding continually meets the barrier of the unknown through the possibility of imagination, which, as we noted earlier, is a possibility under the terms of Climacus's anthropology. He asserts that the interest behind any individual's desire to understand, attains its



highest passion at the frontier which is its encounter with the unknown.<sup>1</sup>

This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think. This passion of thought is fundamentally present everywhere in thought, also in the single individual's thought insofar as he, thinking, is not merely himself ...and this unknown disturbs man and his self-knowledge (PF, pp. 37, 39).<sup>2</sup>

The individual cannot come to any more certain terms in relation to the unknown, because the individual cannot, on her own, learn a perspective on the question of the nature of the unknown other than her own.

[T]he understanding cannot even think the absolutely different; it cannot absolutely negate itself but uses itself for that purpose and consequently thinks the difference in itself, which it thinks by itself. It cannot absolutely transcend itself and therefore [mistakenly] thinks as above itself only the sublimity that it thinks by itself. ...[So,] in defining the unknown as the different

---

<sup>1</sup> Here we should recall the idea of doubt and faith as opposing passions, which are related to the unknown. We can recognize in Climacus's discussion of it, how the passion of doubt is analogous to the passion of faith; for faith discovers its ground beyond the limit of thought (in the unknown), and doubt assumes no ground in thought to be sufficient to uphold it (thus it claims not to know). "A scepticism [Sic] which attacks thought itself cannot be vanquished by thinking it through, since the very instrument by which this would have to be done is in revolt. There is only one thing to do with such a scepticism, and that is to break with it" (CP, p. 292). We have already noted that belief, which proceeds from a prior interest in the truth, is able to break with such a skepticism.

<sup>2</sup> Clearly, in the face of the unknown, the individual's desire to understand the truth about herself will involve her with a higher passion than would any objective inquiry.

the understanding ultimately goes astray and confuses the difference with likeness (PF, pp. 45, 46 [brackets mine]).<sup>1</sup>

So, we can see that self-transcendence is out of the question as an option for any individual who is untruth and who yet would seek the truth as the unknown.

According to Climacus, this condition of subjective untruth cannot be assumed to be an eternal condition, for then the possibility of a positive relationship obtaining between the individual and the truth could never arise. So, he argues, the individual must have become untruth at some point in her life, even at the moment when she first came into existence.

But the subject cannot be untruth eternally, or eternally be presupposed as having been untruth; it must have been brought to this condition in time, or here become untruth in time (CP, p. 186).

He identifies this condition with human sinfulness:

---

<sup>1</sup> See also PF, p. 44: "The paradoxical passion of the understanding is, then, continually colliding with this unknown, which certainly does exist but is also unknown and to that extent does not exist. The understanding does not go beyond this; yet in its paradoxicality the understanding cannot stop reaching it and being engaged with it, because wanting to express its relation to it by saying that this unknown does not exist will not do, since just saying that involves a relation. But what, then, is this unknown, for does not its being the god merely signify to us that it is the unknown? To declare that it is the unknown because we cannot know it, and that even if we could know it we could not express it, does not satisfy the passion, although it has correctly perceived the unknown as frontier. But a frontier is expressly the passion's torment, even though it is also its incentive. And yet it can go no further, whether it risks a sortie through via negationis [the way of negation] or via eminentiae [the way of idealization]" ([ed. brackets]).

Let us now call the untruth of the individual *Sin*. Viewed eternally he cannot be sin, nor can he be eternally presupposed as having been in sin. By coming into existence, therefore (for the beginning was that subjectivity is untruth), he becomes a sinner. He is not born as a sinner in the sense that he is presupposed as being a sinner before he is born, but he is born in sin and as a sinner. This we might call *Original Sin* (*Ibid.*).

Understood in this way, sin presents an insurmountable barrier to the Socratic enterprise of passionate self-recollection in the direction of becoming the truth: "...the back door of recollection is forever closed to him" (CP, p. 187). In other words, sin destroys the idea of the truth as immanent. In relation to the sinful individual, the truth is transcendent.<sup>1</sup>

Here we should recognize that the barrier of her untruth does not constitute a breach in the argument that the individual's passionate concern for herself, in relation to the essential truth about herself, yet constitutes for

---

<sup>1</sup> This disparity is analogous to that which de Silentio identifies between Abraham and the three heroically tragic fathers. Of course, many of the same conclusions follow from this idea; for example: where the individual depends entirely upon the transcendent for the truth, she cannot expect to find the truth immanently. Regardless as to any correspondence between her appropriated sense of the truth and any assertions on the part of other individuals or institutions as to what constitutes the truth, she cannot be essentially interested in any truth that is not truth to her. In de Silentio's terms, this means that, for the Christian, there is an absolute duty to God. A corollary to this axiom is the teleological suspension of the ethical. Climacus makes repeated reference to this term and joins his view to de Silentio's on this point respecting the nature of faith in terms of its social consequences.

her the truth as she believes it. In other words, where it is revealed to her that she is untruth, she is free to appropriate that claim as true -- entirely dependent upon her passion to believe it. As Climacus puts it:

Here, ...subjectivity in beginning upon the task of becoming the truth through a subjectifying process, is in the difficulty that it is already untruth. Thus, the labor of the task is thrust backward, backward, that is, in inwardness. So far is it from being the case that the way tends in the direction of objectivity, that the beginning merely lies still deeper in subjectivity (CP, p. 186).

Because of the impossibility for her recollective recovery of the condition for being in the truth, the individual cannot come to the knowledge of her own untruth on her own. But if she depends simply upon the word of another person to persuade her of her condition, then the idea certainly does not go beyond the Socratic view. For this would make the individual's teacher absolutely essential for her return to the truth. Yet, by virtue of the axiom that subjectivity is untruth, the difficulty remains that there exists no absolute ground in any other human being to which she could appropriately attach her 'infinite personal passionate interest.' In such a situation, the axiom that 'subjectivity is truth' means nothing more than that the truth comprises any number of flighty opinions and can serve merely as a speculative crutch for anxious people.

Here the difficulty is two-fold: first, the individual is in need of the condition for being in the

truth;<sup>1</sup> second, she is in need of the truth. After positing the idea of subjective untruth in his first thought-experiment of Christianity, Climacus observes:

Now, if the learner is to obtain the truth, the teacher must bring it to him, but not only that. Along with it, he must provide him with the condition for understanding it, for if the learner were himself the condition for understanding the truth, then he merely needs to recollect... But the one who not only gives the learner the truth but provides the condition is not a teacher. Ultimately, all instruction depends upon the presence of the condition; if it is lacking, then a teacher is capable of nothing, because in the second case, the teacher, before beginning to teach, must transform, not reform, the learner. But no human being is capable of doing this; if it is to take place, it must be done by the god himself (PF, pp. 14-15).

Unlike any merely occasional teacher under the rubric of the Socratic view, in the Christian view, God serves uniquely and indispensably as the occasion for the believer's coming into a proper relationship with the truth. For God provides her with both the condition for receiving the truth (by virtue of creation first and forgiveness second), and as well presents the truth, as she should appropriate it, in Christ. We shall develop this below.

The truth about humanity that Christianity assumes as the presupposition of the Incarnation is the sinfulness

---

<sup>1</sup> Throughout his discussion, Climacus assumes that the condition for learning the truth is a possibility: in the Socratic view it is the possibility of recollection by virtue of the immortality of the soul; in the Christian view it is the possibility of divine revelation by virtue of the incarnation of the Christ. Without presuming the possibility for the condition of a human being coming into a correct relationship to the truth, this entire discussion would be meaningless.

of all human beings -- considered corporately and individually.<sup>1</sup> In this situation, the individual cannot learn the truth about her untruth unless God proclaims it to her in time. For, as we have noted, both recollection and self-transcendence are impossibilities for her.

If in accordance with the determinations just posited, the subject is prevented by sin from taking himself back into the eternal, now he need not trouble himself about this; for now the eternal essential truth is not behind him but in front of him, through its being in existence or having existed, so that if the individual does not existentially and in

---

<sup>1</sup> This condition is not something for which God is considered to be responsible. In Fragments, Climacus observes that, if this were the case, the difficulty of the human relation to the truth is complicated from the outset by its absolutely contradictory conditions. See PF, p. 15: "Now, inasmuch as the learner exists, he is indeed created, and, accordingly, God must have given him the condition for understanding the truth (for otherwise he previously would have been merely animal, and that teacher who gave him the condition along with the truth would make him a human being for the first time). But insofar as the moment [of the revelation] is to have decisive significance, he must lack the condition, consequently be deprived of it. This cannot have been due to an act of the god (for this is a contradiction) or to an accident (for it is a contradiction that something inferior would be able to vanquish something superior); it must therefore have been due to himself. If he could have lost the condition in such a way that it was not due to himself, and if he could be in this state of loss without its being due to himself, then he would have possessed the condition only accidentally, which is a contradiction, since the condition for the truth is an essential condition. The untruth, then, is not merely outside the truth but is polemical against the truth, which is expressed by saying that he himself has forfeited and is forfeiting the condition" [brackets mine].

existence lay hold of the truth, he will never lay hold of it (CP, p. 187).<sup>1</sup>

Here Climacus identifies the double paradox of the Christian view: first, it is paradoxical that the individual, who is untruth, would learn the truth. "By virtue of the relationship subsisting between the eternal truth and the existing individual, the paradox came into being" (CP, p. 187). Of course, once she relates herself properly -- that is, subjectively -- to this truth, the paradox of subjective truth itself is present to the individual also. This paradox is implicit in the relation of the eternal essential truth to the existing individual,

---

<sup>1</sup> In other words, there is no way for her, on her own, to reach the eternal essential truth about herself. Rather, it must come to her, or be presented to her in such a way that she enters into an inward relationship to it that is not recollective. Furthermore, her relationship to herself by virtue of this revealed truth must ultimately reflect the hope of an eternal happiness; otherwise, the idea does not go beyond the Socratic view. For according to that understanding, passion reaches its highest apogee in relation to the individual's personally relevant belief in an eternal happiness. Apart from the notion of an eternal happiness (as opposed to that of an eternal damnation), the individual's inward relation to the truth would lead her only to despair, and Climacus places the passion of despair below the passion of faith. "When I despair, I use myself to despair, and therefore I can indeed by myself despair of everything; but when I do this, I cannot by myself come back. In this moment of decision it is that the individual needs divine assistance ..." (CP, p. 230) ...and, as we shall observe, the movement of consciousness which makes a bid for divine assistance is faith.

by virtue of the objective uncertainty pertaining to it.<sup>1</sup> Second, it is paradoxical that the eternal essential truth itself would come to exist in time. This is the paradox that distinguishes the Christian truth from the truth as it is understood in the Socratic view. "The eternal truth has come into being in time: this is the paradox" (*Ibid.*). In the Socratic view, the eternal truth is present in time only through recollection and can only be expressed negatively. This means that it does not come into being in time.

When the eternal truth is related to an existing individual it becomes a paradox. The paradox repels in the inwardness of the existing individual, through the objective uncertainty and the corresponding Socratic ignorance. ...When the paradox is paradoxical in itself, it repels the individual by virtue of its absurdity, and the corresponding passion of inwardness is faith (CP, 187, 188).

The first paradox of the Christian truth, then, is the tension of the subjective relationship between the individual, who is untruth, and God, who is truth. The second paradox is the tension in the idea that the eternal decisively entered the temporal realm by being born into it and dying in it. At the risk of presenting too many paradoxes too quickly, we should note that a further paradox obtains here, in the claim that Christ's death overcomes the

---

<sup>1</sup> This first paradox is analogous to the paradox of the Socratically minded individual coming to understand that the truth can be sought meaningfully only through recollection. However, the analogy is weak, for, as Climacus puts it: compared to the earnestness of sin-consciousness, the Socratic paradox of the task of recollection is as a jest (CP, p. 188).



ethical consequences of the individual's untruth -- which consequences amount to despair and condemnation. The tension of this last paradox accentuates the inwardness and personal relevance of the Christian's passion. We shall return to this discussion of the third paradox of Christianity shortly.

Here we must inquire briefly into the possibility for the individual becoming aware of her untruth; this is the first paradox. For the passion, with which she appropriates the meaning for her of Jesus' identity with the eternal truth and, collaterally, the truth of her own untruth, cannot be understood purely to be a matter of her will. If this were the case, then she would herself already possess the condition for knowing the truth, that is, prior to appropriating it passionately. In other words, she could recognize the truth on her own only by virtue of her being in the truth already. But this contradicts the idea that subjectivity is untruth.<sup>1</sup>

Let us not forget this: if the paradox does not provide the condition, then the learner is in possession of it; but if he is in possession of the condition, then he is *eo ipso* himself the truth... (PF, p. 59).

As we have already noted, Climacus calls her passion in relation to her appropriated identification of Jesus with

---

<sup>1</sup> ...by which axiom Climacus describes the individual's condition prior to her receiving the condition for learning the truth from God (supposing that her learning is to involve a greater degree of inwardness on her part than the Socratic understanding requires).

the eternal truth: *faith*. He states that "[t]his passion, then, must be that above-mentioned condition that the [god in time] provides" (PF, p. 59 [brackets mine]). Faith, then, is the condition for appropriating the truth, with which God equips the individual to believe that truth. This is a circular paradox. That is: the believer is given the condition for believing (knowing subjectively) the truth by the truth itself; but the truth does not appear to the believer as the truth except through its having already bestowed upon the believer the condition necessary for her to believe that it is the truth -- which condition is her faith itself. The believer is by no means indifferent to her conditioning, for it corresponds exactly to the degree of her interest. Let us briefly expand on this relation.

Insofar as this relationship of faith focusses on an historical individual, who claimed to be the eternal truth, and on the believer, whose untruth can only be truly indicated to her by the eternal truth who existed in time, but whose recognizability as such is contingent upon his providing the believer with the condition for her belief (for from the point of view of particular existence, any objective recognition is out of the question) -- and this, from her point of view, by virtue of the greatest objective uncertainty -- the relationship is paradoxical. The integrity of this circle lies in the paradox of the Incarnation. This circle links the first and second paradoxes of Christianity.

Climacus repeatedly insists that, as a paradox, the relationship that comprises an individual's Christianity can be grasped only as a paradox. The understanding cannot treat it as if it were anything but a paradox, unless it would contrive to encompass faith as a past stage of life, that is, abstractly. But such a treatment would constitute the annullment of faith and presents the danger that passion and imagination, along with other factors of subjectivity, might be subsumed by an over-estimated intellect.

In existence all the factors must be co-present. In existence thought is by no means higher than imagination and feeling, but coordinate. In existence the supremacy of thought becomes confusing. When it is urged, for example, that the expectation of an eternal happiness hereafter is an idea based upon a finite reflection of the understanding, and cannot maintain itself before the bar of thought; when it is further asserted that this notion may perhaps properly be used in the popular address, for plain people who never rise above the sphere of representative thought, but that the distinction between 'here' and 'hereafter' does not hold for thinkers, -- the answer is that this is quite correct. For thought, abstract thought, the distinction does not hold; but then again it must be remembered that for existence, abstract thought does not hold. The moment I exist, the separation between 'here' and 'hereafter' is there, and the existential consequence of annulling the distinctions is suicide (CP, p. 310).

Climacus frequently denotes the second paradox of faith with the designation *the absurd*. The *absurdity* of Christianity lies in the fact that, even when *objectively* considered, there is a contradiction in the doctrine. The contradiction is the center of the paradox of faith, namely: that God (the eternal truth) existed in time. There is no such contradiction in Socratic recollection.

What now is the absurd? The absurd is -- that the eternal truth has come into being in time, that God has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth, precisely like any other individual human being, quite indistinguishable from other individuals. For every assumption of immediate recognizability is pre-Socratic paganism, and from the Jewish point of view, idolatry... (CP, p. 188).

By virtue of its objective repulsion, this absurdity requires the height of subjective earnestness on the part of the believer, in order for her to hold to it -- for the sake of her eternal happiness. Obviously, this accords with Climacus's definition of faith.

Here it would be easy for us to digress from the heart of Climacus's discussion, to dwell instead on the question of the intellectual demands of keeping the faith. While that discussion has its place, it also has its pitfalls. We shall return to that question, but only once we have outlined the passionate interest that motivates whatever intellectual struggles might arise for particular individuals. Here it is of foremost importance for us to bear in mind that, according to Climacus, the properly Christian relationship to the doctrine is not objective, and that the individual should not exhaust her passion by putting forward assertions and apologia respecting any particular confession. As he puts it: Christianity is not speculative philosophy.

Speculative philosophy is objective, and objectively there is no truth for existing individuals, but only approximations: for the existing individual is precluded from becoming altogether objective by the fact that he exists. Christianity on the contrary is subjective: the

inwardness of faith in the believer constitutes the truth's eternal decision. And objectively there is no truth; for an objective knowledge of the truth of Christianity, or of its truths, is precisely untruth. To know a confession of faith by rote is paganism, because Christianity is inwardness (CP, p. 201).

Climacus states that "it is impossible to exist without passion" (CP, p. 276). He also asserts that "[t]he goal of movement for an existing individual is to arrive at a decision, and to renew it" (CP, p. 277). This is an expression for the individual's ethical interest.

In the Socratic view, the ethically concerned individual continually seeks to know herself and to live according to her knowledge and conception of the Good, which she recollects. This constitutes her ethical existence and her passion is greatest in this connection. "[T]here is only one kind of ethical contemplation, namely, self-contemplation" (CP, p. 284). She is able to proceed with confidence in her life by virtue of possessing the condition for recollection, namely, an immortal soul. That link with the eternal for her is the unmoved point which makes possible for her all her decisions (See *Ibid.*).<sup>1</sup>

The Christian individual, however, faces her existence with the initial dilemma that she cannot, by herself, find the truth, neither within nor without

---

<sup>1</sup> See also CP, p. 138 re: the notion of the immanence of the truth in the Socratic view: "The ethical is ...a correlative to individuality, and that to such a degree that each individual apprehends the ethical essentially only in himself, because the ethical is his complicity with God."

herself. But such knowledge is necessary in order to fulfill the requirement of a properly ethical consciousness. Where, then, does she find the truth about herself, please note, in such a way that the truth becomes for her not simply her condemnation but also her direction for life? Here we return to the matter of the third paradox in Christian faith.

In Climacus's axiom for Christian subjectivity, we can recognize easily that sin-consciousness poses absolute ethical failure at the very awakening of the individual's Christian self-knowledge. The fact that she is expected to find her positive relation to the truth through a relation to an historical person (Christ),<sup>1</sup> does not remove the barrier of sin from between herself and the truth.

The problem here is simply that, considered in this way, the truth is only a doctrine. Expressed in other words, the problem here is, that existence in time is not brought into the truth by virtue of the claim of the presence of the truth in time alone. The question of the individual's relation to the truth must be answered according to the category of subjectivity. Otherwise the claims of Christianity, including the pre-supposed

---

<sup>1</sup> "As is well known, Christianity is the only historical phenomenon that despite the historical -- indeed, precisely by means of the historical -- has wanted to be the single individual's point of departure for his eternal consciousness, has wanted to interest him otherwise than merely historically, has wanted to base his happiness on his relation to something historical" (PF, p. 109).

condemnation of every individual, stand in an indifferent relation to her.

Objectively considered, the historical event of the Incarnation is a great uncertainty.<sup>1</sup> Where the believer appropriates the claim about Christ as the answer to the question: "what is truth?", the objective uncertainty of the claim corresponds to the individual believer's passion of faith. Climacus argues that this tension obtains equally for any individual who receives word of the claim. Equally as it was the case for the historical contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth, so too for any hearer at second hand: her belief can arise only in the paradox of subjective conviction. That is, her passion reaches its height in the face of the objective uncertainty of Jesus' identity with the eternal truth.<sup>2</sup>

This is the case by virtue of the nature of the relationship that obtains between the transcendent eternal truth and the temporal realm. That is to say: where appropriation of the (objectively uncertain) fact of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Climacus offers arguments in both Fragments and Postscript which emphasize that historical fact can only be approximate, and that no argument from effect to cause is sufficient to explicate perfectly the particular existence of an historical reality; the difficulty is greater where the historical reality in question is a reality whose nature contradicts the idea of the historical -- the god in time is just such a reality. See, for example: PF, pp. 40-41; CP, pp. 25-47, entitled *The Historical Point of View*.

<sup>2</sup> Here we should note that this possibility (namely, the possibility of an individual taking *offense* at the claim of Jesus' identity with the eternal truth) is a central theme in Anti-Climacus's book Training in Christianity.

presence of the truth in time is contingent upon inwardness, *the moment* in which the individual receives the truth as the truth, is the moment for her when the eternal essential truth meets her, by virtue of the absurd, in time. This meeting occurs only for the individual, whose passionate desire to know the truth is the characteristic of her inwardness and, therefore, constitutes her motivating interest. In this way, each believer becomes contemporary with Christ -- where Christ is understood to be the eternal truth. For the moment when the eternal and the temporal meet in the individual's passion of faith is a moment solely between the believer and God.<sup>1</sup>

A moment such as this is unique. To be sure, it is short and temporal, as the moment is, past, as the moment is in the next moment, and yet it is decisive, and yet it is filled with the eternal. A moment such as this must have a special name. Let us call it: *the fullness of time* (PF, p. 18).

Once she inwardly accepts her own unconditional untruth, along with the word about the Incarnation, she cannot separate the two. For, on the one hand, the latter

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course, it is by no means *necessary* that she appropriate the truth in this way. As we have already observed through our discussion of the passions of doubt, belief and disbelief, the individual may reflect upon the absurdity of any aspect of the claim, that Jesus of Nazareth was the eternal transcendent truth in time, to fortify her particular propensity. By virtue of the presence of the claim -- whose nature implies the presence of the condition for the individual's appropriating it inwardly -- and the nature of her consciousness, vis-a-vis the unknown, it is also always *possible* for her to accept the claim as true.



reveals to her the former and, on the other hand, the former will draw her, by virtue of her desire to continue in the knowledge of the truth, to maintain the relationship. Here Climacus draws a line between the passion of the ethical and the passion of faith.

[T]o be concerned ethically about another's reality is ...a misunderstanding, since the only question of reality that is ethically pertinent, is the question of one's own reality. Here we may clearly note the difference that exists between faith *sensu strictissimo* on the one hand ...and the ethical on the other. To ask with infinite interest about a reality that is not one's own, is faith, and this constitutes a paradoxical relationship to the paradoxical. ...The analogy between faith and the ethical is found in the infinite interest, which suffices to distinguish the believer absolutely from an aesthete or a thinker. But the believer differs from the ethicist in being infinitely interested in the reality of another (in the fact, for example, that God has existed in time) (CP, pp. 287-288).

But what we have described so far is an unhappy relationship to the truth, sustained by an individual whose appropriated knowledge of her subjective untruth goads her to strive desperately to grasp the truth of another, namely, Christ. The Christian description of her relation to the truth does not end here, for at this point she must constantly relate herself to the truth through her own untruth, which is an impossibility. Here God's forgiveness of sin affords the individual the condition for her enjoyment of a happy relation to the truth. Only in the forgiveness of sin can her passion find the condition for its continuance.

Clearly, her belief in the forgiveness of her sin overcomes whatever condemnation otherwise inheres in her

initial consciousness of her untruth. By virtue of the fact that the eternal truth constitutes the unmoved center for any individual's developed ethical orbit, the forgiveness of sin stands as a paradox from the point of view of any ethically conscious individual. For it means that she, who once recognized her condition to be one of untruth, in relation to the eternal truth (by virtue of the absurd), yet, again by virtue of the absurd, has received the word that her untruth no longer remains to describe her condition in relation to the eternal truth. She can enter into a properly subjective relation to this truth only by accepting it as a command from eternity. In other words, she can believe in the forgiveness of her sin only by believing and, with reference to the words attributed to Jesus, she must understand her belief as an act of obedience.

Climacus asserts that, where the individual fails properly to lay hold of this truth, which is the second condition for the possibility of her eternally happy relation to the truth, she despairs.

Again, it would be erroneous to identify the forgiveness of sin foremost as a doctrine. For in that way the occurrence of any *essentially* true relation between forgiveness and the individual through faith becomes impossible. Just as the individual's subjective relation to Christ's historical existence is necessary in order for her relation to Christ to be a relation of faith, so too her relation to the forgiveness of sin must be a relation which

focusses on the idea that it is *her* untruth, *her* sin, *her self* that God's forgiveness promises to transform.

The object of faith is not a doctrine, for then the relationship would be intellectual, and it would be of importance not to botch it, but to realize the maximum intellectual relationship. The object of faith is not a teacher with a doctrine; for when a teacher has a doctrine, the doctrine is *eo ipso* more important than the teacher, and the relationship is again intellectual. ...The object of faith is the reality of the teacher, that the teacher really exists. The answer of faith is therefore unconditionally yes or no. The object of faith is God's reality in existence as a particular individual, the fact that God has existed as an individual human being. ...Christianity is therefore not a doctrine, but the fact that God existed (CP, p. 290).

Here we turn to Climacus's unpublished letter to Theophilus Nicolaus, who, as it would appear from the tone and contents of the letter, missed the point of both Climacus's and de Silentio's work. The following extract will serve to isolate Climacus's main point about the relation between rationality, the absurd and faith:

According to your interpretation, what we pseudonymous writers, who, please note, say of ourselves that 'we do not claim to have faith,' call the absurd, the paradox, is according to your explanation by no means the absurd but rather 'the higher rationality,' although not in the speculative sense. ...But pay attention to the definition; if the absurd is not the negative sign and predicate which dialectically makes sure that the scope of 'the purely human' is qualitatively terminated, then you actually have no sign of your higher reason; you are taking the chance that your 'higher reason' does not lie on that side of 'the human,' in the heavenly regions of the divine, of revelation, but on this side, and somewhat farther down, in the underground territory of misunderstanding. The absurd is the negative sign. 'I,' says the believer, 'I really cannot be satisfied with having only rhetorical predicates for determining where I have my life, where, from the spiritual point of view, I am, so to speak. But the absurd is a category, and a category that can exercise a restraining influence. When I believe, then assuredly

neither faith nor the content of faith is absurd. O, no, no -- but I understand very well that for the person who does not believe, faith and the content of faith are absurd, and I also understand that as soon as I myself am not in the faith, am weak, when doubt perhaps begins to stir, then faith and the content of faith gradually begin to become absurd for me. But this may have been the divine will: in order that faith -- whenever a man will have faith or not -- could be the test, the examination, faith was bound up with the absurd, and the absurd formed and composed in such a way that only one force can prevail over it -- the passion of faith -- its humility sharpened by the pain of sin-consciousness.' ...[A]s I see it, if you are going to hold forth on Christianity in the future, whether you let your summons on that subject be sent out to 'all thinking persons' or not, it is necessary for you first of all to take up Christianity, which, probably without even noticing it, you lost in your zeal to prove that there is no paradox in Christianity, which, as stated before, you did superbly well: both the paradox and Christianity, jointly and separately, vanished completely (JP, #6596).

Climacus's interest in writing this letter is clear. He does not want any thinker to take the category of the absurd out of the context of his experimental endeavour to clarify the passionate nature of Christianity. From the believer's point of view, the object of her faith is not a matter of indifferent comprehensibility. But this does not mean that, from her point of view, faith is purely a matter of incomprehension. Rather, it means that the

comprehensibility of the object of faith, as such, comes to the individual believer by virtue of her faith alone.<sup>1</sup>

By attempting abstractly to remove the idea of paradox from the task of Christian faith, Nicolaus moved in the direction of establishing the objective comprehensibility of the object of Christian faith.

Granted, Climacus's discussion is merely experimental and, precisely insofar, it too is abstract. However, in contrast to Nicolaus's attempt to reduce faith to a question of relatively superior understanding, Climacus's approach is more accommodating. For his anthropology and conception of Christian faith, taken

---

<sup>1</sup> "SUBJECTIVELY, WHAT IT IS TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN IS DEFINED THUS: The decision lies in the subject. The appropriation is the paradoxical inwardness which is specifically different from all other inwardness. The thing of being a Christian is not determined by the *what* of Christianity but by the *how* of the Christian. This *how* can only correspond with one thing, the absolute paradox. There is therefore no vague talk to the effect that being a Christian is to accept, and to accept, and to accept quite differently, to appropriate, to believe, to appropriate by faith quite differently (all of them purely rhetorical and fictitious definitions); but to *believe* is specifically different from all other appropriation and inwardness. Faith is the objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness, which in this instance is intensified to the utmost degree [by *sin-consciousness*]. This formula fits only the believer, no one else, not a lover, not an enthusiast, not a thinker, but simply and solely the believer who is related to the absolute paradox. Faith therefore cannot be any sort of provisional function. He who from the vantage point of a higher knowledge would know his faith as a factor resolved in a higher telos has *eo ipso* ceased to believe. Faith must not rest content with unintelligibility; for precisely the relation to or the repulsion from the unintelligible, the absurd, is the expression for the passion of faith" (CP, p. 540).

together, posit faith, and an eternal happiness, as equally accessible to all ethically conscious human beings. By understanding faith to be the gift of God, Climacus avoided the hubristic tendency of some of the thinkers of his day to view all of existence from God's perspective.

Through his two books, Climacus sought to bring the essentially life-related claims of Christianity to the attention of his readers. In this respect, his interest led naturally into the developments of the idea of becoming a Christian, that Kierkegaard pursued in his subsequent autographic works and in the writings of Johannes Anti-Climacus.

Anti-Climacus's two works appeared after Kierkegaard had already published most of his autographic Christian literature.<sup>1</sup> Whereas Climacus addresses the topic of Christian faith experimentally only (not claiming to be a Christian himself), Anti-Climacus writes about Christianity from the viewpoint of faith.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> In the final section of this chapter, we shall discuss the ambiguity in the relation between Kierkegaard and this, his last, pseudonym.

<sup>2</sup> This is clear in the full title of his first book: The Sickness Unto Death -- A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening. The hortative tone of the sub-titles for each of the three sections of Training In Christianity also demonstrate this: Part I *For Revival and Increase of Inwardness*, Part II *A Biblical Exposition and Christian Definition of Concepts*, Part III *Christian Expositions*.

In The Sickness Unto Death, he deals primarily with the nature of *faith vis-à-vis despair*. In his collection of discourses entitled Training in Christianity, he deals with the nature of *faith vis-à-vis offense*. Working from his descriptions of despair and offense, we shall see how faith, by his definition, pre-supposes both.

In order to understand this relation, we shall begin with his discussion of the human self. The Sickness Unto Death opens with a dense description of it:

The human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself. The self is not the relation but the relation's relating to itself (SD, p. 43, trans. Hannay).<sup>1</sup>

The initial "relation" in this description denotes the anthropological conception that Anti-Climacus shares with Climacus. That is: that "a human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity..." (SD, p. 13).

While this definition of the constituent polarities of human being serves to describe any particular human

---

<sup>1</sup> I have chosen to quote Hannay's translation first, to indicate his preference to translate the reflexive verb 'to relate' in this context without the complication of an additional 'itself'. In a note he observes that the repeated term 'itself' can be misleading, insofar as some interpreters have mistaken the intended sense to be a distinction between "an actual and a true self" (see p. 21, his Introduction). I am content that the Hongs' translation of the verb (which includes the first 'itself' in the formula "relates itself to itself"), is equally legitimate. I quote from their translation hereafter.

being, Anti-Climacus asserts that "[l]ooked at in this way a human being is not yet a self" (*Ibid.*). For, as his definition points out, the self consists in the self-relation of the synthesis. In other words, a human being may properly be considered to be a "self" only under the condition that she is interested to consider herself.<sup>1</sup>

Anti-Climacus completes his description of the self by asserting its contingency:

Such a relation that relates itself to itself, a self, must either have established itself or have been established by another. If the relation that relates itself to itself has been established by another, then the relation... relates itself to that which established the entire relation. The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another (SD, pp. 13-14).

In more plain terms, he understands that human beings are created by God.<sup>2</sup>

Implicit to the qualification 'creatureliness,' is the creature's relation to the creator. It is possible that an individual may or may not be either abstractly cognizant, or ethically concerned to acknowledge this relation. Here

---

<sup>1</sup> We shall see how this conception of human self-consciousness corresponds to Anti-Climacus's tripartite characterization of despair.

<sup>2</sup> Anti-Climacus speaks in abstract terms of "the power that established" the self; in Christian terms (and he is a Christian writer), the power that established the individual is God. See SD, p. 82, for his definition of faith, which is a parallel expression for the state wherein the self is free from despair. "Faith is: that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself rests transparently in God."



we shall not pursue the question of the individual's solely abstract cognizance of God. For, as we shall see, that question is not pertinent to an understanding of despair or faith.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, the "self" is a designation for any ethically conscious individual. For the interest which motivates the self-relation of the individual (who is a synthesis as described above), is self-interest. This corresponds with Johannes Climacus's description of the "ethical self."

Anti-Climacus makes the ethical interest of the self plain, where he writes of *THE GRADATIONS IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE SELF* (see SD, pp. 79-82):

The criterion for the self is always: that directly before which it is a self, but this in turn is the definition of 'criterion.' Just as only entities of the same kind can be added, so everything is qualitatively that by which it is measured, and that which is its qualitative criterion is ethically its goal; the criterion and goal are what define something, what it is, with the exception of the condition in the world of freedom, where by not qualitatively being that which is his goal and his criterion a person must himself have merited this disqualification. Thus the goal and the criterion still remain discriminatingly the same,

---

<sup>1</sup> According to Anti-Climacus's analysis, any individual's purely cognitive (as opposed to an ethical) consciousness of God demonstrates that the individual in question lacks the condition for faith.

making it clear just what a person is not -- namely, that which is his goal and criterion (SD, pp. 79-80).<sup>1</sup>

This latter possibility "in the world of freedom" -- namely, the individual's self-disqualification from ethical justification through ethical failure (the individual's failure to become the self that her criterion for herself dictates) -- reflects the nature of despair.<sup>2</sup> For, according to Anti-Climacus:

...despair is not a simple misrelation but a misrelation in a relation that relates itself to itself and has been established by another, so that the misrelation in that relation which is for itself also reflects itself infinitely in the relation to the power that established it [that is, its criterion] (SD, p. 14 [brackets mine]).

In order to proceed from this general point, we must acknowledge Anti-Climacus's categorically Christian agenda. To begin with, he asserts that "...every determination of the essentially Christian ...is related to Christ, has Christ in mind (SD, p. 129). As it turns out, his entire discussion of despair focusses on the Christ as the absolute criterion for ethically justified human existence.

---

<sup>1</sup> See also his discussion of the lack of earnest ethical consciousness in the lives of most people: "Most men probably live with all too little consciousness of themselves to have any idea of what consistency is; that is, they do not exist qua spirit. ...They play along in life, so to speak, but they never experience putting everything together on one thing, never achieve the idea of an infinite self-consistency" (SD, p. 107).

<sup>2</sup> See discussion below and SD, pp. 15-16.

A self directly before Christ is a self intensified by the inordinate concession from God, intensified by the inordinate accent that falls upon it because God allowed himself to be born, become man, suffer, and die also for the sake of this self. As stated previously, the greater the conception of God, the more self; so it holds true here: the greater the conception of Christ, the more self. Qualitatively a self is what its criterion is. That Christ is the criterion is the expression, attested by God, for the staggering reality that a self has, for only in Christ is it true that God is man's goal and criterion, or the criterion and goal (SD, pp. 113-114).

As we shall see, Anti-Climacus's conception of despair as sin pivots on this dogmatic point about God being "the goal and criterion for man." Without disclosing too much of the discussion prematurely, we may spell out the terms of the possibility for the individual's despair, as follows: Where the individual understands that "the power that established it" is God and, further, where she recognizes God in Christ to be her ethical criterion (or pattern), her despair constitutes her absolute ethical failure. We shall return to this point in the argument shortly.

On the other side of possibility, any individual's enjoyment of a happy ethical consciousness would mean her emancipation from any misrelation (despair). And, as we have already noted, despair denotes a simultaneous misrelation of the individual in her self-relation and in her relation to God. The two misrelations are inseparable.

The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating

itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it (SD, p. 14).<sup>1</sup>

Anti-Climacus outlines three forms of despair: "In despair not to be conscious of having a self (not despair in the strict sense); In despair not to will to be oneself; In despair to will to be oneself" (See SD sub-title to *Part One A*, p. 13). From the foregoing discussion, we can see that the possibility for any misrelation of the self lies in two places. First, despair may be rooted in her relation to herself. For, regardless of her consciousness of God as her criterion, any unequal emphasis on the individual's part upon any polarity of her synthetic composition would constitute a misrelation of her fundamental elements. Second, in the face of her relation to her absolute criterion, the self can choose any of a number of possible types of relation to that criterion. Obviously, it is only for the sake of clarity that we have contrived to separate these two loci of despair. For despair in the self reflects the self's misrelation to God, and *vice versa*. Let us expand, then, on these two places of despair.

We may characterize the first place of despair with reference to the terms of Anti-Climacus's anthropology. That is, by virtue of her dichotomous makeup in the context

---

<sup>1</sup> Here we may observe that this formula corresponds to the definition of faith that Anti-Climacus presents later in the book. But, before we move to that point as a conclusion, we must discuss the possibility of despair in terms of his definition of the self.

of freedom,<sup>1</sup> the individual can pursue one facet of her nature to the consequence of an imbalance in the synthesis.<sup>2</sup> For example, she may pursue possibility to the effect that the constraints of necessity become for her only an aggravation. As we have already noted in Johannes Climacus's discussion of consciousness, possibility is the realm of cognition and of the imagination. In this case, the individual's despair becomes evident in her propensity to pursue the fantastical as over against the actual. The more she focusses her attention on possibility, the farther

---

<sup>1</sup> For his understanding of freedom, see SD, p. 29: "The forms of despair may be arrived at abstractly by reflecting upon the constituents of which the self as a synthesis is composed. The self is composed of infinitude and finitude. However, this synthesis is a relation, and a relation that, even though it is derived, relates itself to itself, which is freedom. The self is freedom. But freedom is the dialectical aspect of the categories of possibility and necessity."

<sup>2</sup> Of course, this 'prior' designation of despair solely in the context of the first relation is a matter of convenience, reflecting the order of description with which Anti-Climacus begins his treatment of the self. As it will become clear in the ensuing discussion, any misrelation in the first relation, unconscious or conscious, receives its categorical definition as 'despair' by virtue of the fundamentally misrelated self's coincident misrelation to the power that established it (God). In other words, what I have called the 'first place of despair' is contingent upon what I have called the 'second place of despair.' The individual's relation to herself must be understood in the light of her relation to the power that established her. Anti-Climacus argues that the first place of despair constitutes an equal possibility for pagan and Christian individuals alike. Where the second place of despair is qualified by the individual's consciousness of a personal relation to the Christ as the criterion for herself, that despair is unique to individuals with an awareness of the specific claims of Christianity.

away she gets from her actual self and, therefore, from the ethical.

Of course, according to the terms of this example, the individual's interest might lead her in the opposite direction. She may see only limitation (necessity) pressing all around her and, by ignoring possibility, despair of her circumstances and condition.<sup>1</sup> This despair is apparent in the fatalist.

He also argues that, as long as the individual is not conscious of herself in an ethical sense, her despair remains unconscious.<sup>2</sup> As an example of this, we may consider an individual, who derives whatever sense of herself she possesses from external sources, such as the opinions of her peers. If she comes to the place where she voices despair over the impossibility of establishing her identity, precisely there she would demonstrate that she had been suffering her own misrelation of herself -- for example, to finite criteria -- all along. "As soon as

---

<sup>1</sup> In the section of the book sub-titled *DESPAIR CONSIDERED WITHOUT REGARD TO ITS BEING CONSCIOUS OR NOT, CONSEQUENTLY ONLY WITH REGARD TO THE CONSTITUENTS OF THE SYNTHESIS*, Anti-Climacus sketches the possible directions and consequences of despair considering only the synthetic nature of human beings (See SD, pp. 29-42).

<sup>2</sup> Anti-Climacus cautions against over-simplification in this discussion. "Actual life is too complex merely to point out abstract contrasts such as that between a despair that is completely unaware of being so and a despair that is completely aware of being so. Very often the person in despair probably has a dim idea of his own state, although here again the nuances are myriad" (SD, p. 48).

despair becomes apparent, it is manifest that the individual was in despair" (SD, p. 24).

Given the ideal definition of the self (as free from despair), we can see that unconscious despair constitutes a misrelation. Granted, the individual's passion to despair in this manner would be far weaker than it would be in any self-consciously wilfull movement of despair. Nevertheless, this qualification does not relieve her of the burden of responsibility for the misrelation.

[I]f the misrelation continues, it is not attributable to the misrelation but to the relation that relates itself to itself. That is, every time the misrelation manifests itself and every moment it exists, it must be traced back to the relation. ...Every actual moment of despair is traceable to possibility; every moment [the individual] is in despair he *is bringing* it upon himself (SD, pp. 16, 17).

Why is the self responsible even for the misrelation of which she is unconscious? According to Anti-Climacus, this is the case, because, first, the individual is responsible for herself by virtue of her freedom to choose

herself<sup>1</sup> and, second -- what makes this choice of any significance -- is the fact that the individual can never fall entirely out of relation to her absolute criterion.

This explains why the individual seems to bring herself under God's judgement only once she possesses the consciousness of God as her absolute criterion. Regardless of the apparent newness of this relation, the continuity of the ideal relationship between the creator's standard and the creature demonstrates the illusory nature of the idea of the individual's first coming under judgement through her new consciousness of the judge and standard.

[T]he concept 'judgement' corresponds to the single individual; judgement is not made *en masse*. ...No matter how many are judged, if the judging is to have any earnestness and truth, then each individual is judged. ...This is why God is 'the judge,' because for him there is

---

<sup>1</sup> "Despair is the misrelation in the relation of a synthesis that relates itself to itself. But the synthesis is not the misrelation; it is merely the possibility, or in the synthesis lies the possibility of the misrelation. If the synthesis were the misrelation, then despair would not exist at all, then despair would be something that lies in human nature as such. That is, it would not be despair; it would be something that happens to a man, something he suffers, like a disease to which he succumbs, or like death, which is everyone's fate. No, no, despairing lies in man himself. If he were not a synthesis, he could not despair at all; nor could he despair if the synthesis in its original state from the hand of God were not in the proper relationship. Where, then, does despair come from? From the relation in which the synthesis relates itself to itself, inasmuch as God, who constituted man a relation, releases it from his hand, as it were -- that is, inasmuch as the relation relates itself to itself. And because the relation is spirit, is the self, upon it rests the responsibility for all despair at every moment of its existence, however much the despairing person speaks of his despair as misfortune and however ingeniously he deceives himself and others, ..." (SD, pp. 15-16).



no crowd, only single individuals. [B]efore God [even members of a secure majority] were and are continually single individuals; the person sitting in a showcase is not as embarrassed as every human being is in his transparency before God (SD, pp. 123 [and note], 124).

Given that the individual has been established by God, we may consider this ineluctable relation of responsibility with a view to the constituent elements of the individual. On the one hand, the eternal in her makeup constitutes a constant link between herself and God. On the other hand, the temporal in her makeup links her to her absolute criterion in time, that is, the Christ. Of course, in order for the individual to despair of this identity, this latter connection requires that the individual be aware of the claims of Christianity. For the individual living in Christendom, this knowledge is considered to be a given. In other words, according to Anti-Climacus, she cannot escape the ideal criterion for herself -- the criterion in transparent relation to which alone she can become herself in the highest sense (free from all forms of despair).<sup>1</sup>

[T]o despair is a qualification of spirit and relates to the eternal in man. But he cannot rid himself of the eternal --

---

<sup>1</sup> Here we may relate an observation about "transparency." "This is the relationship of conscience. The arrangement is such that through the conscience the report promptly follows each guilt, and the guilty one himself must write it. But it is written with invisible ink and therefore first becomes legible only when it is held up to the light in eternity while eternity is auditing the consciences. Essentially, everyone arrives in eternity bringing along with him and delivering his own absolutely accurate record of every least trifle he has committed or omitted" (SD, p. 124).

no, never in all eternity. He cannot throw it away once and for all, nothing is more impossible: at any moment that he does not have it, he must have thrown it or is throwing it away -- but it comes again, that is, every moment he is in despair he is bringing his despair upon himself. For despair is not attributable to the misrelation but to the relation which relates itself to itself. A person cannot rid himself of the relation to himself any more than he can rid himself of his self, which, after all, is one and the same thing, since the self is the relation to oneself (SD, p. 17).

We can see that this is the second place of the possibility of despair. That is, it is possible that the individual could fail happily to acknowledge God as the eternal power that established her and, of equal importance, fail to recognize Christ as the ethical criterion for herself.

According to Anti-Climacus's definition of the criterion of the self, we can see that an individual's consciousness of her failure to meet the criterion for herself involves her in the consciousness of her disobedience. For, with respect to its being the criterion for the self, any ethical absolute constitutes an imperative for the ethically self-conscious individual.

As we noted above, Anti-Climacus argues that the individual's conception of herself is heightened in relation to the criterion for herself that she recognizes. Where God is the criterion for the self, the individual attains to the highest conception of herself possible. And, it follows, her consciousness of failure to meet the criterion constitutes the first occasion for the possibility of her

greatest despair. For the leap to consciousness of ethical failure is collateral to an intensification of passion in the individual's self-consciousness. Where the content of that consciousness is absolute ethical failure, the individual may despair of the possibility of enjoying an identity with her criterion, or over her failure to attain to it herself.<sup>1</sup> Here the point is that, from the understanding of the imperative nature of an ethical absolute, it follows that ethical failure before God, as the criterion for the self, is disobedience towards God, which is sin.<sup>2</sup>

The point that must be observed is that the self has a conception of God and yet does not will as he wills, and thus is disobedient. Nor does one only occasionally sin before God, for every sin is before God, or, more correctly, what really makes human guilt into sin is that the guilty

---

<sup>1</sup> "...We despair over that which binds us in despair -- over a misfortune, over the earthly, over a capital loss, etc. -- but we despair of that which, rightly understood, releases us from despair: of the eternal, of salvation, of our own strength, etc. With respect to the self, we say both: to despair over and of oneself, because the self is doubly dialectical" (SD, note pp. 60-61). As we shall see, these two most terrible forms of despair may occur only in the individual who is conscious of her transparency before God. Anti-Climacus calls both these forms of despair "despair of the forgiveness of sins" (SD, p. 124). We shall return to this.

<sup>2</sup> "Despair is intensified in relation to the consciousness of the self, but the self is intensified in relation to the criterion for the self, infinitely when God is the criterion. In fact, the greater the conception of God, the more self there is; the more self, the greater the conception of God. Not until a self as this specific single individual is conscious of existing before God, not until then is it an infinite self, and this self sins before God" (SD, p. 80).

one has the consciousness of existing before God (SD, p. 80).

Anti-Climacus asserts that "Christianity begins here -- with the teaching about sin, and thereby with the single individual" (SD, p. 120).<sup>1</sup> He explains that this separates Christianity from paganism in its highest -- the Socratic -- form. For, according to Socrates, "[s]in is ignorance" (SD, p. 87).

As we have noted earlier in this thesis, Socrates asserted what Anti-Climacus calls "an intellectual categorical imperative" (SD, p. 90). This reflects the Greek confidence in the axiom "knowledge is virtue." In contrast to this view, Anti-Climacus emphasizes the orthodox Christian understanding that sin is not determined negatively (that is, as an absence of knowledge of the truth), but rather positively, as an act of wilfull disobedience on the part of the individual.<sup>2</sup> He claims that

---

<sup>1</sup> This brings to mind Johannes Climacus's discussion of the believer's relation to her own untruth in her sin-consciousness. We shall see that Johannes Climacus and Johannes Anti-Climacus share the same vocabulary with respect to the doctrine of the Incarnation.

<sup>2</sup> "Scripture always defines sin as disobedience" (SD, p. 81).

the possibility for this lies in the difference between knowledge of the Good and the will to do the Good.<sup>1</sup>

[T]he Greek mind does not have the courage to declare that a person knowingly does wrong, knows what is right and does the wrong; so it manages by saying: If a person does what is wrong, he has not understood what is right. ...Socrates explains that he who does not do what is right has not understood it, either; but Christianity goes a little further back and says that it is because he is unwilling to understand it, and this again because he does not will what is right. And in the next place it teaches that a person does what is wrong (essentially defiance) even though he understands what is right, or he refrains from doing what is right even though he understands it; in short, the Christian teaching about sin is nothing but offensiveness toward man, charge upon charge; it is the suit that the divine as the prosecutor ventures to bring against man (SD, pp. 94-95).

To use Johannes Climacus's terminology, we have arrived at the question: how can the individual, who is untruth, come to know the truth and, consequently, come to know of her untruth? Anti-Climacus addresses the same question and presents the same answer:

---

<sup>1</sup> This position can take a number of different forms, not the least significant of which characterizes Johannes Climacus vis-a-vis the claims of Christianity. "Christianly understood, every poet-existence (esthetics notwithstanding) is sin, the sin of poetizing instead of being, of relating to the good and the true through the imagination instead of being that -- that is, existentially striving to be that. ...[Such a poet, who] became unhappy in the religious life, dimly understands that he is required to give up this anguish -- that is, in faith to humble himself under it and take it upon himself as part of the self -- for he wants to keep it apart from himself, and precisely in this way he holds on to it, although he no doubt believes this is supposed to result in parting from it as far as possible, giving it up to the greatest extent humanly possible. ...But in faith to take it upon himself -- that he cannot do, that is, he is unwilling or here his self ends in vagueness" (SD, pp. 77, 78).

[N]o man of himself and by himself can declare what sin is, precisely because he is in sin; all his talk about sin is basically a glossing over of sin, an excuse, a sinful watering down. That is why Christianity begins in another way: man has to learn what sin is by a revelation from God; sin is not a matter of a person's not having understood what is right but of his being unwilling to understand it, of his not willing what is right (SD, p. 95).

It is by virtue of its incomprehensibility, that he identifies the teaching about sin as a revelation . "It must be believed. To comprehend is the range of man's relation to the human, but to believe is man's relation to the divine" (*Ibid.*). By the "incomprehensibility" of the reality of sin, Anti-Climacus means simply that sin is ethically pertinent and true only for the individual who believes that she is a sinner. In other words, as an

ethical designation, sin cannot be properly grasped objectively.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, Anti-Climacus defines sin as: "before God in despair not to will to be oneself, or before God in despair to will to be oneself" (SD, p. 81). However, given his discussion of the positive nature of sin, he modifies this definition to understand sin as follows: "To sin is: 'after being taught by a revelation from God what sin is, before God in despair not to will to be oneself or in despair to will to be oneself'" (SD, p. 101). Both forms of despair in this definition qualify as intensifications of despair. This is so by virtue of the fact that, in either instance, the individual sinner is conscious of her

---

<sup>1</sup> "Sin cannot be thought speculatively at all. The individual human being lies beneath the concept; an individual human being cannot be thought, but only the concept 'man.' ...-- But just as one individual person cannot be thought, neither can one individual sinner; sin can be thought, but not one individual sinner. That is precisely why there is no earnestness about sin if it is only to be thought, for earnestness is simply this: that you and I are sinners. Earnestness is not sin in general; rather, the accent of earnestness rests on the sinner, who is the single individual. ...Speculation does not take into consideration that with respect to sin the ethical is involved, always pointing in the direction opposite to that of speculation and taking the very opposite steps, for the ethical does not abstract from actuality but immerses itself in actuality and operates mainly with the help of that speculatively disregarded and scorned category: individuality. Sin is a qualification of the single individual; it is irresponsibility and new sin to pretend as if it were nothing to be an individual sinner -- when one himself is this individual sinner. ...The earnestness of sin is its actuality in the single individual, be it you or I" (SD, pp. 119-120).

sinfulness.<sup>1</sup> That is, she does not deny the claim of the revelation. Rather, she appropriates it so seriously as to cause herself to ignore the final point: that, by faith, reconciliation follows upon condemnation. In other words, she despairs in the consciousness of her despair and fails to make the next movement: the movement of faith.

Sin itself is severance from the good, but despair over sin is the second severance. This, of course, squeezes the uttermost demonic powers out of sin, gives it the profane toughness or perverseness that must consistently regard everything called repentance and grace not only as empty and meaningless but also as its enemy, as something against which a defense must be made most of all, just as the good defends itself against temptation (SD, p. 109).

The first of these two forms of despair Anti-Climacus calls the individual's despairing consciousness of "the break with the good" (*Ibid.*). He also calls it "the

---

<sup>1</sup> This explains why he considers the despair that is unconscious of being despair, through lack of self-consciousness, to be "not despair in the strict sense" -- that is, despair as identical with sin. "[D]espair must be considered primarily within the category of consciousness; whether despair is conscious or not constitutes the qualitative distinction between despair and despair. Granted, all despair regarded in terms of the concept is conscious, but this does not mean that the person who, according to the concept, may appropriately be said to be in despair is conscious of it himself. Thus, consciousness is decisive. Generally speaking, consciousness -- that is, self-consciousness -- is decisive with regard to the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self. A person who has no will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has also" (SD, p. 29).



sin of despairing over one's sin" (*Ibid.*).<sup>1</sup> In the face of her failure to live in accordance with God's criterion for herself, the individual permits her ethical discontinuity in relation to her ethical criterion to constitute her ideal consistency. "It is an effort to give stability and interest to sin as a power by deciding once and for all that one will refuse to hear anything about repentance and grace" (SD, p. 110). That is, in order to continue her life with a semblance of ethical continuity, she gives up her criterion for herself -- thereby giving up herself in its highest sense. The contradiction here is obvious. "[D]espair over sin is conscious particularly of its own emptiness, that it has nothing on which to live, not even an idea of its own self" (*Ibid.*). Anti-Climacus characterizes this despair as "the despair of weakness, which is offended and does not dare to believe" (SD, p. 113). He concludes:

Ordinarily weakness is: in despair not to will to be oneself. Here this is defiance, for here it is indeed the defiance of not willing to be oneself, what one is -- a sinner -- and for that reason wanting to dispense with the forgiveness of sins (*Ibid.*).

The second form of self-conscious despair Anti-Climacus calls "the break with repentance" (SD, p. 109), and "the sin of despairing of the forgiveness of sins (offense)"

---

<sup>1</sup> In other words, it is the individual's despair over herself in despair, without the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins.

(SD, p. 113).<sup>1</sup> In this despair, the individual rejects the paradox of the Atonement. In Johannes Climacus's analysis, we have already seen at what points the individual may take offense at the claims of Christianity. The paradox of the Atonement is simply the last paradox of Christian faith. This is the final paradox, of which the individual's acceptance forms a bridge from her essentially unhappy, to her essentially happy relationship to God.<sup>2</sup> Offense at this paradox takes the form of an explicit denial of the possibility of God's forgiveness. "When the sinner despairs of the forgiveness of sins, it is almost as if he walked right up to God and said, 'No, there is no forgiveness of sins, it is impossible'..." (SD, p. 114). Anti-Climacus calls this "the despair of defiance, which is offended and will not believe" (SD, p. 113). He concludes:

---

<sup>1</sup> In other words, this is the individual's despair of the possibility of the forgiveness of her sins. It is the individual's despair in relation to the full Christian conception of God's will, in deeper continuity with her despair over herself.

<sup>2</sup> "[T]he paradox is the implicit consequence of the doctrine of the Atonement. First of all, Christianity proceeds to establish sin so firmly as a position that the human understanding can never comprehend it; and then it is this same Christian teaching that again undertakes to eliminate this position in such a way that the human understanding can never comprehend it. ...Christianity is as paradoxical on this point as possible; it seems to be working against itself by establishing sin so securely as a position that now it seems to be utterly impossible to eliminate it again -- and then it is this very Christianity that by means of the Atonement wants to eliminate sin as completely as if it were drowned in the sea" (SD, p. 100).

Ordinarily defiance is: in despair to will to be oneself. Here this is weakness, in despair to will to be oneself -- a sinner -- in such a way that there is no forgiveness (*Ibid.*).

Throughout this discussion of the two most passionate movements of despair, the term *offense* has occurred several times. Anti-Climacus states that "the definition of sin includes the possibility of offense" (SD, p. 83), so it is not surprising that the term should surface here. Before we proceed to elaborate on the meaning of offense, we must give attention to "the antithesis sin/faith" (*Ibid.*).

Anti-Climacus's definition of faith juxtaposes faith and despair as opposites.<sup>1</sup>

The opposite to being in despair is to have faith. Therefore, the formula set forth above, which describes a state in which there is no despair at all, is entirely correct, and this formula is also the formula for faith: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it (SD, p. 49).

---

<sup>1</sup> "Very often ...it is overlooked that the opposite of sin is by no means virtue. In part, this is a pagan view, which is satisfied with a merely human criterion and simply does not know what sin is, that all sin is before God. No, the opposite of sin is faith, as it says in Romans 14:23: 'whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.' And this is one of the most decisive definitions for all Christianity -- that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith" (SD, p. 82).

Anti-Climacus claims that the individual who suffers in unconscious despair is not dynamically related to faith.<sup>1</sup> For she makes no conscious movements either towards, or away from the truth claims of Christianity.

Compared with the person who is conscious of his despair, the despairing individual who is ignorant of his despair is simply a negativity further away from the truth and deliverance. Despair itself is a negativity; ignorance of it, a new negativity. [T]o reach the truth, one must go through every negativity (SD, p. 44).

In despairing over her sin, the individual's consciousness remains oriented towards repentance and faith. For she does not wish to remain before God in sin. However, as we have already noted, her desperate desire to reconcile herself, in her sin-consciousness, with the idea of God, can lead her to establish herself in an ethically contradictory position of self-denial before God.

In despairing of the forgiveness of her sins, the individual only further antagonizes her relation to herself.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Every human existence that is not conscious of itself as spirit or conscious of itself before God as spirit, every human existence that does not rest transparently in God but vaguely rests in and merges in some abstract universality (state, nation, etc.) or, in the dark about his self, regards his capacities merely as powers to produce without becoming deeply aware of their source, regards his self, if it is to have intrinsic meaning, as an undefineable something -- every such existence, whatever it achieves, be it most amazing, whatever it explains, be it the whole of existence, however intensively it enjoys life esthetically -- every such existence is nevertheless despair. That is what the ancient Church Fathers meant when they said that the virtues of the pagans were glittering vices: they meant that the heart of paganism was despair, that paganism was not conscious before God as spirit" (SD, p. 46).

That is, by denying the final word of the claims of Christ, she becomes her own adversary. This form of despair is polemical against the Atonement.

All three forms of despair are opposed to faith. For, in each case, the individual fails to find herself in the possibility of a happy, self-conscious relation to God. Anti-Climacus states that, in contrast to the despairing individual,

[t]he believer has the ever infallible antidote for despair -- possibility -- because for God everything is possible at every moment. This is the good health of faith that resolves contradictions (SD, pp. 39-40).

From despair over her sin, the individual can move to repentance.<sup>1</sup> Only by virtue of the possibility, that for God all things are possible, can she move from repentance to faith.<sup>2</sup> In other words, from the point where, through a revelation, she becomes aware of her sinfulness, she can hope to establish her self only by resting transparently in the consciousness of God's forgiveness. In her despair,

---

<sup>1</sup> "[I]f repentance is to arise, there must first be effective despair, radical despair, so that the life of the spirit can break through from the ground upward" (SD, p. 59).

<sup>2</sup> "What is decisive is that with God everything is possible. This is eternally true and consequently true at every moment. ...[T]he question is whether [the individual] will believe that for God everything is possible, that is, whether he will believe. But this is the very formula for losing the understanding; to believe is indeed to lose the understanding in order to gain God. ...This is the battle of faith, battling, madly, if you will, for possibility, because possibility is the only salvation" (SD, p. 38).

"salvation is, humanly speaking, utterly impossible; but for God everything is possible!" (SD, p. 38). For this reason, she must depend on a revelation to disclose to her the possibility for the forgiveness of her sins. Just as sinfulness is not something an individual could make up on her own, neither is the forgiveness of sins an idea rooted in her imagination.

At times the ingeniousness of the human imagination can extend to the point of creating possibility, but at last -- that is, when it depends upon *faith* -- then only this helps: that for God everything is possible (SD, p. 39).

Like Johannes de Silentio, *Anti-Climacus* argues that belief requires from the believer the passion to imagine beyond the category of the probable. In his terms, her understanding in faith must lead her into a self-consciousness beyond that of the "philistine-bourgeoisie."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> "The philistine-bourgeois mentality is spiritlessness; determinism and fatalism are despair of spirit, but spiritlessness is also despair. The philistine-bourgeois mentality lacks every qualification of spirit and is completely wrapped up in probability, within which possibility finds its small corner; therefore it lacks the possibility of becoming aware of God. Bereft of imagination, as the philistine-bourgeois always is, whether alehouse keeper or prime minister, he lives within a certain trivial compendium of experiences as to how things go, what is possible, what usually happens. In this way the philistine-bourgeois has lost his self and God. In order for a person to become aware of his self and of God, imagination must raise him higher than the miasma of probability, it must tear him out of this and teach him to hope and to fear -- or to fear and to hope -- by rendering possible that which surpasses the sufficient standard of any experience" (SD, p. 41).

Like Johannes Climacus, Anti-Climacus argues that the believer's hope in the claim, that for God all things are possible, is not to be mistaken for a "higher comprehension" in the sphere of abstraction.

[I]f all Christianity turns on this, that it *must* be believed and not comprehended, that *either* it must be believed or one must be scandalized and offended by it -- is it then so praiseworthy to want to comprehend? (SD, p. 98)

The individual's conscious movement from sin-consciousness, through repentance, to hope for the forgiveness of her sins is not a movement of objective inquiry. For it depends upon the revelation of God's will in the Christ. And, as we have already learned, belief in a revelation of personal significance requires a conscious movement of personal passionate interest.

Here we return to our discussion of Anti-Climacus's use of the term "offense." In Sickness, he asserts that "the possibility of offense is the dialectical element in everything essentially Christian" (SD, p. 125). In Training, he states that "[t]he possibility of offense is the crossways, or it is like standing at the crossways. From the possibility of offense a man turns either to offense or to faith" (TC, p. 83).

He explains that offense is related to despair and that offense occurs in the individual in her unhappy relation to the same claims of Christianity. Clearly, the basic connection between despair and offense lies in the category of the individual. Only an individual can despair:

for, as we have seen, despair is a qualification of the self. Similarly, only an individual can be offended.

[O]ffense is the most decisive qualification of subjectivity, of the individual, that is possible. ...Thus offense is related to the single individual. And with this Christianity begins, that is, with making every man a single individual, an individual sinner; and here everything that heaven and earth can muster regarding the possibility of offense (God alone has control of that) is concentrated -- and this is Christianity. Then Christianity says to each individual: You shall believe -- that is, either you shall be offended or you shall believe. Not one word more; there is nothing more to add. 'Now I have spoken,' declares God in heaven; 'we shall discuss it again in eternity. In the meantime, you can do what you want to, but judgement is at hand' (SD, p. 122).

We can see that both despair and offense are movements of passion which, moreover, are contrary to faith. Here we may also note that, by Anti-Climacus's definitions, the individual can despair of, and be offended at, only one object: Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. This is apparent in the overlap between his terminology and that of Climacus.<sup>1</sup> It is obvious that among the potentially offensive claims about Christ are included every decisive Christian category, such as: sin, repentance of sin, and the call to faith in the Incarnation, the Atonement and eternal life. "In the denial of Christ as the paradox lies, in turn, the denial of all that is essentially Christian: sin, the forgiveness of sins, etc." (SD, p. 131).

---

<sup>1</sup> "At the root of the antithesis [of sin/faith] lies the crucial Christian qualification: before God, a qualification that in turn has Christianity's crucial criterion: *the absurd, the paradox, the possibility of offense*" (SD, p. 83).



In the individual, offense, like despair, can comprise passions reflecting ignorance of, or ethically sensitive responses to, the claims of Christ.

Offense is unhappy admiration. ...The degree of offense depends on how passionate a man's admiration is. The more prosaic people, lacking in imagination and passion and thus not particularly given to admiration, are also offended, but they limit themselves to saying: Such a thing I just can't understand; I leave it alone. They are the skeptics. But the more passion and imagination a person has -- consequently, the closer he is in a certain sense (in possibility) to being able to believe, N.B., to humbling himself in adoration under the extraordinary -- the more passionate is his offense, which finally cannot be satisfied with anything less than getting this rooted out, annihilated, trampled into the dirt (SD, p. 84).

Towards the end of Sickness, Anti-Climacus provides a tripartite characterization of offense. He writes that the first form is "the lowest [and] most innocent form, humanly speaking," (SD, p. 129) and consists in the individual's avoidance of any decision about the claims of Christ. He argues that most people are unaware of this form of offense, just as they are unaware of the imperative nature of Christ's commands. "[T]o be neutral about Christ is offense" (*Ibid.*).

That Christianity is proclaimed to you means that you shall have an opinion about Christ; He is, or the fact that He exists and that He has existed is the decision about all existence. If Christ is proclaimed to you, then it is offense to say: I do not want to have any opinion about it (*Ibid.*).

He states that the second form of offense is "negative" and that it is identical to the despair of the religious poet. "It honors Christianity insofar as it

expresses that the question 'What do you think of Christ?' is actually the most crucial of all questions" (SD, p. 131). But to the individual who is offended in this way by the claims of Christ, her deference to the extraordinary recompenses her no joy. Anti-Climacus says that this offense takes the form of suffering (SD, p. 130). In his purely experimental consideration of Christianity, Johannes Climacus exemplifies this form of offense.

He calls the third and most passionate form of offense "the positive form" (SD, p. 131). In his description of it, Anti-Climacus indicates how closely the most terrible form of despair and the greatest degree of offense are bound together.

It declares Christianity to be untrue, a lie; it denies Christ (that he has existed and that he is the one he said he was) either docetically or rationalistically, so that either Christ does not become an individual human being but only appears to be, or he becomes only an individual human being -- thus, either he docetically becomes fiction, mythology, which makes no claim upon actuality, or he rationalistically becomes an actuality who makes no claim to be divine. ...This form of offense is sin against the Holy Spirit. ...This offense is the highest intensification of sin, something that is usually overlooked because the opposites are not construed as being sin/faith (*Ibid.*).

Here we shall ask again why it is the case that an individual may become so offended at the claims of Christ as to forfeit her eternal happiness.

The first answer to this question is a simple one. According to the conception of human beings that Climacus and Anti-Climacus share, every individual is, in a sense, free to choose herself according to whatever criterion she

judges to be appropriate. Anti-Climacus observes that, in the case of most individuals, despair takes the form of a lack of spiritual interest. Similarly, their offense most commonly takes the form of indecision. So the question does not, as might otherwise be expected, reveal myriad demonically self-obsessed individuals, who would rather have an opportunity to confront the Christ with a sneer than while away their days in secret torment. The situation is quite to the contrary.

However vain and conceited men may be, they usually have a very meager conception of themselves nevertheless, that is, they have no conception of being spirit, the absolute that a human being can be; but vain and conceited they are -- on the basis of comparison. Imagine a house with a basement, first floor, and second floor planned so that there is or is supposed to be a social distinction between the occupants according to floor. Now, if what it means to be a human being is compared with such a house, then all too regrettably the sad and ludicrous truth about the majority of people is that in their own house they prefer to live in the basement. Every human being is a psychical-physical synthesis intended to be spirit; this is the building, but he prefers to live in the basement, that is, in the sensate categories. Moreover, he not only prefers to live in the basement -- no, he loves it so much that he is indignant if anyone suggests that he move to the superb upper floor that stands vacant and at his disposal, for he is, after all, living in his own house (SD, p. 43).

But such an argument, based on quantities of spiritually impoverished individuals, does not begin to address the gravity of the possibility that even one individual might forfeit her eternal happiness in such a nonchalant manner. Is it not remarkable, that something presumably of eternal significance might so easily go unnoticed and unheeded by even one? Anti-Climacus

explicates in more precise terms the possibility for offense.

The existence of an infinite qualitative difference between God and man constitutes the possibility of offense, which cannot be removed. Out of love, God becomes man. He says: Here you see what it is to be a human being, but he adds: Take care, for I am also God -- blessed is he who takes no offense at me (SD, pp. 127-128).<sup>1</sup>

This possibility may become actual in the individual once she regards Christ as the criterion for herself. As the absolute pattern for the individual follower, Christ does not present a code of repeatable and necessary outward behaviours. Again and again, Anti-Climacus emphasizes that the identification between Christ and the eternal truth is the paradox of the "God-man," and

---

<sup>1</sup> According to Anti-Climacus, the absolute difference obtains between God and man most clearly in man's sinfulness. "The teaching about sin -- that you and I are sinners -- a teaching that unconditionally splits up 'the crowd,' confirms the qualitative difference between God and man more radically than ever before, for again only God can do this; sin is indeed: *before God*. In no way is man so different from God as in this, that he, and that means every man, is a sinner, and is that 'before God,' whereby the opposites are kept together in a double sense: they are held together, they are not allowed to go away from each other, but by being held together in this way the differences show up all the more sharply, just as when two colors are held together, the opposites appear more clearly by juxtaposition. Sin is the one and only predication about a human being that in no way, either by denial or by idealization, can be stated of God. To say of God (in the same sense as saying that he is not finite and, consequently, *via negationis*, that he is infinite) that he is not a sinner is blasphemy. As sinner, man is separated from God by the most chasmal qualitative abyss. In turn, of course, God is separated from man by the same chasmal qualitative abyss when he forgives sins" (SD, pp. 121-122).

that this identity is at the heart of the claim that Christ is the pattern for humanity.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the repeated historical expression of this identity, the individual can appropriate the claim as true only by faith -- her faith. Here lies the possibility of offense: that no matter how direct the communication of the claim of Christ's identity, the believer cannot appropriate the claim directly as true. She must believe the claim in order not to be offended. And belief requires a movement of consciousness against human understanding.

Further, this requirement to believe -- and from the believer's side this is an imperative -- is the possibility of offense. For it means that the individual must accept her own absolute ethical failure and, in the consciousness of her sin, nevertheless believe that she is forgiven, miraculously, by God; further, it requires that she live according to that new relationship. That is, she is required to live as Christ, in the same relationship of

---

<sup>1</sup> "Christian doctrine is the teaching about the God-man, about the kinship between God and man, but of such a nature, please note, that the possibility of offense is, if I may say it in this way, the guarantee whereby God protects himself against man's coming too close. To be so close to God, as Christianity teaches that man can come to him, dares come to him, and shall come to him in Christ -- such a thought never occurred to any man. ...A man who still preserves his understanding must come to the verdict that only a god bereft of understanding could concoct such a teaching. ...God and man are two qualities separated by an infinite qualitative difference. Humanly speaking, any teaching that disregards this difference is demented -- divinely understood, it is blasphemy. In paganism, man made god a man (the man-god); in Christianity God makes himself man (the God-man)" (SD, pp. 125-126).

worship and devotion to God. As we have already seen, from the individual's standpoint, these Christian dogmas do not rest truly in objective certitude.

Whether a person is helped miraculously depends essentially upon the passion of the understanding whereby he has understood that help was impossible and depends next on how honest he was toward the power that nevertheless did help him. As a rule, however, men do neither the one nor the other; they cry out that help is impossible without once straining their understanding to find help, and afterward they ungratefully lie (SD, p. 39).

The possibility of offense and despair does not lie in the paradoxes of the claims of Christianity alone, but in the paradoxical-ethical nature of the claims as well. On the one hand, "Christ came to the world for the purpose of saving the world" (TC, p. 232). This claim is wrapped in the paradox of revelational truth. Such a claim becomes offensive to the rationalist, the poet and the moralist only once the premise of the claim is voiced: that the world and particular individuals need to be saved. Here the religio-ethical component comes to the forefront. The complete expression of the dogma, then, is as follows:

Christ came to the world for the purpose of saving the world, and at the same time (as was implied in His first purpose) to be 'the pattern,' to leave behind Him footsteps for those who would attach themselves to Him, who thus might become followers, for 'follower' corresponds to 'footsteps' (*Ibid.*).

Finally, then, the question of offense focusses on the question of the individual's disobedience and insubordination before the divine imperative.

On the whole, it is unbelievable what confusion has entered the sphere of religion since the time when 'thou shalt' was abolished as the sole regulative aspect of man's relationship to God. This 'thou shalt' must be present in any determination of the religious; in its place, the God-idea or the concept of God has been fancifully used as an ingredient in human importance, in becoming self-important directly before God (SD, p. 113).

Anti-Climacus makes it plain that, from his point of view, this describes the most passionate form of offense among most 'Christians' in Christendom. As he presents it, the problem of offense rests in the compromised quality and precision of preaching and ecclesiastical praxis that accompanies a rationalistically and poetically interested approach to the essentially religio-ethical teaching of the claims of Christ. He concludes:

...There is so much talk about being offended by Christianity because it is so dark and gloomy, offended because it is so rigorous etc., but it would be best of all to explain for once that the real reason that men are offended by Christianity is that it is too high, because its goal is not man's goal, because it wants to make man into something so extraordinary that he cannot grasp the thought (SD, p. 83).

For the attentive reader, these remarks by Anti-Climacus should recall to mind Kierkegaard's self-perceived task in Christendom: to disenchant the merely nominal church from the notion that they had succeeded in linking church and state, that their tasks as Christians were entirely compatible with their everyday interests and endeavours.

Yes, right here is the real conflict between Christianity and man -- the fact that Christianity is the absolute, or

teaches that there is some absolute, and demands of the Christian that his life express that there is an absolute. It is in *this* sense that I say that I have not known a Christian; I have never seen any man whose life expressed *this*. The Christianity of Christians is profession and profession, an accent upon orthodoxy and an attack upon heterodoxy, etc., but their lives, just exactly like the pagans', express that men live in relativities. Their lives are nothing but relativities (JP, #485).

Like Kierkegaard, Anti-Climacus lays some of the blame for this false understanding on the polity and praxis of the Danish clergy. Similarly, he does not restrict his critique to the formal example given by that leadership. Rather, through his analysis of despair, offense and faith, he makes it clear that every individual in Christendom bears responsibility for herself, not only in her relation to herself and others, but also in her relation to God. Later in this section, we shall see that, as for Anti-Climacus, so too for Kierkegaard, these three relations are inextricably bound together.

This brings us back to the question of the nature of the pseudonymity of part of the authorship. For here we confront two, more particular questions related to it. First, we want to know why, if Kierkegaard shares with Anti-Climacus so many fundamental understandings, did he develop this last significant pseudonym at all? Second, what edifying benefit accompanies Anti-Climacus as an author? This latter question bears equally on Kierkegaard's relation to Johannes de Silentio and Johannes Climacus and on their respective functions in the greater programme of edification.



Now that we have some idea of the substance of these pseudonyms' thoughts, in this final section of the thesis, we shall investigate this tripartite pseudonymity a little more closely, by comparing its content and direction with Kierkegaard's aim, as we can discover this in his Journals and autographic books.

In our inquiry, we must not lose sight of the formative goal of this chapter, that is, to establish Kierkegaard's understanding of the relation of reason and faith in human consciousness. As we outlined this task at the beginning of the chapter, we shall attempt to identify lines of continuity on this topic, which run through the writings of these three pseudonyms. Our conclusions will help us to answer the question of the nature of the authorship vis-à-vis its aim. For, as we have already noted, Kierkegaard understood the greater part of his writings to have had a religious motivation: to lead readers away from primarily esthetical, speculative or moralistic views of life.

While we are plotting this last section, we should not ignore the fact that, throughout this thesis, as throughout Kierkegaard's works, Socrates appears as a significant figure. We have already seen that he serves as a point of departure, not only for Johannes Climacus's extensive reflections upon the Christian's relation to Christianity, but also for the development of the authorship, understood as a maieutically edifying project.

Therefore, in the interest of continuity and clarity, along with our comparison of Kierkegaard's and the three pseudonyms' treatments of reason and faith, we shall include a comparison of Kierkegaard and Socrates. At the end of the section, we will focus attention upon their respective self-understandings vis-à-vis the pursuit of the truth.

At this point, however, we shall begin our comparison of Kierkegaard with the three pseudonyms we selected for this investigation: Johannes de Silentio, Johannes Climacus and Johannes Anti-Climacus. We pursue this analysis with a view to elucidating the pseudonyms' respective orbits and points of view vis-a-vis Kierkegaard's, in order to answer the question of his understanding of the relation of reason and faith in human consciousness.

As an author, Johannes de Silentio is poetic in two senses. Of lesser interest to us is the point that, by virtue of his purely imaginary existence, he is nothing but ideal (poetic). His book can no more verify his actual existence than could any reader's conception of him. Notwithstanding this peculiarity, it is of great significance to the interested reader, that de Silentio approaches Abraham poetically. That is, he writes as a poet.

In other words, he does not consider Abraham's faith with ethical seriousness. As well as he is able, he is concerned to describe Abraham's unique passion to obey God

in faith; but he considers himself to be a mere admirer. On the grounds that he cannot identify himself with Abraham, he claims that he could not himself endure the strenuousness of faith. His numerous expressions to this effect betray his purely esthetical fascination with Abraham. In the spinning of his panegyric to the father of faith, de Silentio loses himself in his "eternal validity" (to use his own term). In this respect, de Silentio stands a world apart from Kierkegaard.

Repeatedly, in his Journals and autographic writings, Kierkegaard emphasizes the ethical<sup>1</sup> as the lowest common denominator of humanity. He argues that the individual runs a great risk in immersing herself in esthetical diversions. For, according to him, while the realm of esthetics reflects relative differences between persons, those differences are not of eternal significance and, mistaken for virtues, they come up empty in eternity. He asserts that only in ethical self-concern does the individual actually relate herself meaningfully to the questions of virtue, truth and the Good.

In the realm of genius, the realm of natural qualifications, the realm of the esthetic, what counts is: to be able. In

---

<sup>1</sup> We must bear in mind the ambiguity of the meaning of the term "the ethical" in connection with Fear and Trembling. Johannes de Silentio uses the term as the equivalent of "social morality"; here, as elsewhere throughout the thesis, I use the term in its more general sense: that it pertains to an individual's self-conscious desire to live consistent with her idea of what is good as over against what is evil.

the realm of the ethical: to be obliged. Therefore the ethical is related to the universally human; whereas the esthetic is related to the differences between man and man. It would be a contradiction of the ethical to speak of *being obliged* if every human being did not have the conditions for being able if he himself only wills. In connection with the ethical there are, therefore, no conditions; it is the unconditional ought which tolerates no conditions because it presupposes no conditions (JP, #975).

Concerning this difference between the esthetical and the ethical, de Silentio appears to be a deceiver.<sup>1</sup> For he chooses to view Abraham as the exceptional one, and thereby fixes his own, and perhaps his reader's, relation to God negatively; for he claims that he does not have faith.

---

<sup>1</sup> "This form of deceit appears frequently in ordinary life -- when ethical tasks are stressed and someone is prodded a bit to act, he answers: I do not have the capacity for it. The deceit is to transform the ethical task into a task according to differences. The question is not at all about capacities but about will -- the simplest man has capacities, if he wills. But in this way one parries and also profits by seeming to be modest. Well, thanks for that. Let us take the most rigorous ethics, the [ten] commandments. If the thief were to say, when one tells him to quit stealing: Yes, that is all right for those who have capacities for such things, but I do not have such capacities -- would this not be strange talk? But this is the way it always is with the ethical. The ethical requirement for a man to witness for the truth is not a matter of intellectuality but a matter of will. The requirement is not that he become a genius -- O, no, it is very simple; but it is hard on flesh and blood, and so one tries to slip out of it by making it a matter of esthetic differences and says modestly: Such capacities I do not have. Thereby one lies in yet another way, for one weakens the impression of the true ethicist, as if he is able to do something easily because he has such and such capacities -- but it is not a question of capacities. But people are afraid of the true ethicist and would rather protect themselves against him by making him out to be unusually gifted so that his life loses the power of being a requirement, for if it depends upon capacities, then it is nonsense to require of a person what has not been given to him" (JP, #989).

As we noted earlier in this chapter, his desire was simply to understand Abraham (a poetic-speculative enterprise) -- not in earnest to learn about faith for himself. Again, this approach is contrary to Kierkegaard's emphasis on the ethical dimension of faith.

Faith, the man of faith's conflict with the world. is a battle of character. Human vanity resides in wanting to comprehend, the vanity of not willing to obey as a child but of wanting to be an adult who can comprehend and who then will not obey what he cannot comprehend, that is, who essentially will not obey. The man of faith is a person of character who, unconditionally obedient to God, grasps it as a character-task that one is not to insist upon comprehending. ...What is it to believe? It is to will (what one *ought* and because one *ought*), God-fearingly and unconditionally obediently, to defend oneself against the vain thought of wanting to comprehend and against the vain imagination of being able to comprehend (JP, #1129, #1130).

De Silentio addresses faith, but only imaginatively. In this connection, we can see that he is closer to Kierkegaard's position than, for example, the unnamed author of the first volume of Either / Or. Insofar as he might draw the interested reader into the web of the authorship, de Silentio enjoys a place somewhere about the middle of the structure.

Notwithstanding this difference, much of what he says is compatible with Kierkegaard's view. Presumably, if there were no continuity in the authorship whatsoever, then it would be difficult to see that a reader, who might be entirely sympathetic to de Silentio, could somehow be drawn further *towards* Christianity by Kierkegaard's other writings.

As a general example of such continuity, we may observe how, in his concern for honesty respecting the difference between what one claims to possess and what one actually possesses, de Silentio is akin to Kierkegaard.

More specifically, his complaint against the equation of the transcendent God's will with the universal (that is, any basis for ethics construed in immanent terms) is identical to Kierkegaard's complaint against Christendom: that the absolute had been relativized and conceptually accommodated to justify and sanctify the civic *status quo*. Kierkegaard's refusal to bow to the demands and abuses of his contemporaries reflects his own conviction to that effect.

Alas, I shudder when I think such thoughts [of the Christian requirement]! I notice all too well how mixed up I am because of having been brought up in Christianity from childhood. What a distance from our life to that of an apostle's (from JP, #3098 [brackets mine]).

Johannes de Silentio speaks of faith as a "second immediacy." In this expression he captures the idea that he develops in Fear and Trembling: that in his movement of infinite resignation, Abraham first gives up everything that is of immediate significance to him (the first immediacy) -- including his worldly understanding of probability and likelihood; and then, "by virtue of the absurd" (by believing that for God nevertheless all things are possible), he rejoins his formerly immediate interests with the confidence that he ought to do so, but only in such a

way as to please God. The intermediary movement of his desire to relate to God in obedience in relation to his immediate interests, transforms his relation to the immediate world, from an immediate relation to a faith relation. In this way, the world becomes to him a second, faith-conditioned immediacy. It is decidedly by faith, not by any sense of social morality, that Abraham loves Isaac.

Kierkegaard recognizes this movement in both paganism and Christianity. In connection with Socrates's ethical motivation to seek the truth maieutically, which was his response to the oracle's declaration measured against his own experience,<sup>1</sup> and which clearly brought him into conflict with the civic order, he recognizes Socrates's submission to an absolute duty other than the universal.

Immediacy is attained again only ethically; immediacy itself becomes the task -- you *shall* attain it. During the most developed period of the most intellectual nation Socrates attained ignorance (ignorance, with which one begins in order to know more and more) and how? Because in radical ethicality he took his task to be that of preserving himself in ignorance, so that no temptation without and no temptation within would ever trick him into admitting he knew something, he who nevertheless in another sense did know something. ...[S]piritually the following is true: if I cannot recover innocence, then all is lost from the beginning, because the primary fact is simply that I and everyone have lost innocence. If for a moment I omit all the more specifically dogmatic aspects of the cooperation of the spirit, etc., I can define rebirth in this way: it is immediacy won ethically (from JP, #972).

Apparently in his own life, Kierkegaard held to this ideal understanding of the believer's relation to the world.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Plato's *Apology*, 21 a - 23 b.

For example, Emil Boesen recounts that, from his deathbed, Kierkegaard confessed his lack of faith, which had led him to break his engagement to marry Regina Olsen. Had he had faith, he would have married her.

He is similar to de Silentio on this point, in that he recognized the difference between possessing faith and merely asserting the possession of it. He is different, though, for in his confession of that particular failure, he does not deny his obligation to pursue faith in repentance.

An essentially ethical individual ...says to himself -- this is what I will. Quite possibly I cannot reach it, but this is what I will. If I cannot reach it immediately, then I will creep; if in my whole lifetime I cannot do any more than creep along, then I shall creep along my whole life -- but this is the direction (JP, #973).

In this instance, Kierkegaard does not dwell fancifully upon the idea of having married Regina and regret his decision on that poetic basis; he simply admits his failure in the light of his honest pursuit of faith. To his understanding at the time, he could trust neither himself, nor Regina to survive the marriage happily. If he had had faith, his own understanding of likelihood would not have held sway. Instead, the possibility of faith, which by definition is the possibility of the apparently impossible, would have given him the confidence to pursue the relationship, in the hope that God would sustain them in their love for God and, so also, for one another.

[Faith hopes also in this life, but ...by virtue of the absurd, not by virtue of the human understanding. The



paradox in Christian truth is invariably due to the fact that it is the truth as it exists for God. The standard of measure and end is superhuman; and there is only one relationship possible: faith (JP, #1843).

Despite his speculative understanding of the movement of faith, de Silentio fails to appropriate it for himself. He fails to understand by faith, or even to understand faith as an essential concern for himself, and so he pursues esthetical diversion in the ethical grandeur (as he perceives it) of another person. Like Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard considers every such approach to the essential (ethical) greatness of another person to be misguided.<sup>1</sup>

Most men have a conception of greatness, but however they turn and rotate it, a false image slips in -- it was that way long ago, or this one and that one were great, or this one and that one are great -- but that one himself be this, that the task is intended for existence, this escapes them (JP, #973).

Before we continue to compare Johannes Climacus with Kierkegaard, we should spend a little time to consider de Silentio's notorious term: "teleological suspension of the ethical."

We have already noted the intended sense of the term in Fear and Trembling, that is: in faith, the individual believer's duty to obey God, as she understands that duty, ranks higher than her duty to obey the strictures of her

---

<sup>1</sup> Excepting the case, of course, where the person under scrutiny is the truth for the observer, namely, the Christ considered by a Christian.

immediate society. Only in this way could de Silentio make sense of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son and remain silent about it. But the term may be put to greater service, in conjunction with both de Silentio's book and Kierkegaard's understanding of faith.

Towards the end of our discussion of Fear and Trembling, we found an allusion to the power of sin to suspend the ethical. Plainly put, sin eradicates the possibility of the fulfillment of the ethical. But Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms all agree that the possibility of the fulfillment of the ethical inheres in the definition of the ethical. (If this were not so, then the ethical is an empty proposition from the outset.)

Ethicists like Socrates, the religiously committed in the more rigorous sense, ...are completely oriented teleologically and are continually pressing into the existential (JP, #997).

From this understanding of the ethical, we can see that its *telos* [end] is its fulfillment. Where sin intervenes between the germ of an ethical disposition and its coming to fruition in an ethical life, the end is suspended while the germ is stifled under the impossibility of its growth.

The ethical begins straightway with this requirement to every person: you *shall* be perfect; if you are not, it is immediately charged to you as guilt. In this way an end is made to all the chatter about wanting to be, wanting so very much to be --. No, in relation to the ethical you can speak only in self-accusation. If you are not perfect, you ought not have the audacity to chatter about wanting so very much to be, but you must admit humbly and at once: It is my

fault; if I am not perfect, it is my own fault. Ethically, I myself am the only one who prevents me from being perfect, I, myself, who do not will rightly. To say that I would like very much to be, but that there is something else which prevents me, is to insult God and providence, is high treason against the ethical, is insidious hypocrisy (JP, #998).

As we shall repeat at the end of this section, this is the initial point of departure between the Socratic and the Christian understandings of ethical striving.<sup>1</sup> Here, we may note briefly that the Socratic view does not take ethical failure so seriously as does Christianity. In Christianity, ethical failure is taken to be evidence of the continuance of sin. Repentance, then, does not become a matter simply of turning away from particular evil deeds (as is the case with the Socratic confidence in knowledge overcoming ignorance); rather, it consists in the individual's willing to be turned away from herself by God. This is at the heart of Christian repentance.

Getting back to the immediate point, now, we can see how, according to de Silentio's brief discussion, sin constitutes a teleological suspension of the ethical. In this sense, we may use the term to describe one aspect of the essential difference between "the ethical" properly considered, and "the Christian" in Kierkegaard's writings. We have yet to consider the term in a third sense.

---

<sup>1</sup> We shall discuss the second point of departure below.

It is impossible to ignore the implicit presence of the ethical in its suspension by sin. That is, although sin precludes positive ethical continuity, by virtue of the sinner's negative wilfullness, it sustains a relation to the idea of the ethical. Particularly with regard to Christianity, sin as disobedience is recognizable, as such, because its criterion is its relation to the truth against which it is polemical. The ethical as *telos*, then, is suspended in sin; but the ethical as negative standard is sustained in sin.

In this way, the sinner's relation to herself and her world receives the same expression as Abraham's faith relation: "Sin is not the first immediacy; sin is a later immediacy" (FT, p. 98). In other words, her negative relation to her absolute ethical standard may be easily identified by virtue of the fact that *it* dictates her relation to her immediate society, and not *vice versa*. If the sinner wishes to repent of her sin, then she enters a different teleological suspension of the ethical.

Here the suspension inheres in the believer's enjoyment of the forgiveness of sin. As we have just observed, sin stands in the way of the ethical as *telos*, but does not escape evaluation by the (relatively negative) criterion of the ethical. Upon initial consideration, it might appear that the individual sinner's positive return to her absolute ethical criterion would comprise an ethical movement: but it does not.

In the forgiveness of sin, the ethical is entirely suspended: both as *telos* and as criterion. As we have already noted, Kierkegaard's understanding of the Christian's pursuit of truth is forward, in time. Insofar as it is forward, it possesses a certain similarity to the ethical. For, as we have observed above, implicit to the individual's sense of the ethical is the *telos* of fulfillment. But sin stands between the believer and her ethical goal. If forgiveness is to be decisive in the believer's relation to the truth, then it must proffer more than a temporary reprieve from the consciousness of guilt. For, unlike the consciousness of guilt, the consciousness of sin posits an absolute break between the individual and the truth. What makes the Christian conception of the pursuit of truth finally different from the Socratic (ethical) conception is its wilfull passivity. The believer trusts God to transform her, to bring her to the truth. This, as we mentioned above, is at the heart of Christian repentance. "[R]epentance is the highest ethical expression, but precisely as such it is the deepest ethical self-contradiction" (FT, p. 98 note).

In other words, in the Christian's belief in her sinfulness, the truth cannot constitute her ethical goal (for the ethical as *telos* is suspended by sin). Likewise, in the forgiveness of sin, the truth is not an ethical criterion, for the qualification "ethical" yet denotes the possibility of the individual striving directly towards the

end she perceives to be true. and we have already observed that the believer depends upon God and not upon her own striving to bring her to the truth. In this sense, then, the forgiveness of sin constitutes a teleological suspension of the ethical.

*Christianly* the emphasis does not fall so much upon to what extent or how far a person succeeds in meeting or fulfilling the requirement, if he actually is striving, as it is upon his getting an impression of the requirement in all its infinitude so that he rightly learns to be humbled and to rely upon grace. To pare down the requirement in order to fulfill it better (as if this were earnestness, that now it can all the more easily appear that one is earnest about wanting to fulfill the requirement) -- to this Christianity in its deepest essence is opposed. No, infinite humiliation and grace, and then a striving born of gratitude -- this is Christianity (JP, #993).

Aside from utilizing the specific terminology of the teleological suspension of the ethical to designate the ideal difference between the ethical and the Christian approaches to the truth in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and autographic writings, it should be fairly clear to the reader that these ideas about faith, in relation to human understanding, esthetics and ethics, which de Silentio develops in Fear and Trembling, are consistent with Kierkegaard's view, which he presents in his published Christian discourses and in his Journals. As we compare Kierkegaard with Johannes Climacus, we will consider more specifically how he maintains the ethical concern in his understanding of Christian existence.

Johannes Climacus admits of himself, that he wishes to treat Christianity and the question of the relation

between reason and faith experimentally only. Insofar as his interest is not clearly personal, he is similar to Johannes de Silentio. Also, in several places he expresses his desire to clarify categories and concepts, in such a way that the strenuousness (as he claims to perceive it) of Christian existence, might receive its due respect and understanding. In his desire for clarity and honesty, he is similar to both de Silentio and Kierkegaard.

Unlike de Silentio, Climacus focusses attention on the individual's relationship to God in Christian faith. Similarly, whereas de Silentio uses the term "the absurd" to describe the difference between the knight of faith's eternal hope in the pursuit of his temporal interests and the hopes of everyday sorts of people, whose interests in the world by and large are simply immediate, Climacus applies it to the Christian's hope for an eternal happiness.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard understands "the absurd," or the movement of faith, in both connections: in terms of hope for this life and respecting eternal life. In contrast to the two pseudonyms, it is notable that he does not construe either hope in terms of reward. For him, hope, like faith, is simultaneously a gift from God and a task for a lifetime.

---

<sup>1</sup> As we have already seen, according to Climacus, the Christian's hope in God for the forgiveness of her sin is paradoxical; it is "by virtue of the absurd."

Unlike Climacus, Kierkegaard describes himself repeatedly as a penitent. If we are to take him at his word, by this term he demonstrates that he is passionately interested in Christianity. In other words, he desires that God would figure as the middle term in all his relations: to himself, others and God.

It might seem peculiar for someone to hope that God would sustain her in all her relations -- particularly in her relation to God. But this is certainly no more peculiar than the prayer: "I believe, O God, ...forgive my unbelief." The plea proceeds from the understanding that faith and righteousness are the gift of God and, accordingly, God is the intermediary between the believer and God.

One can say that Christianity did not enter the world in order to develop the great virtues in the individual -- on the contrary, the great virtues and the heroic were prominent in paganism. But then the situation was such that simply because the "ideal" [in its essence] was not known in paganism, the individual was prompted to imagine that he himself could be approximately the ideal and to pride himself over it, so that the contrast became one between the heroes and the rest of humanity who were almost animals. Then the true ideal [viz. the Christ] appears. The true ideal makes it clear that all need grace and humbles everyone. Selfish distinctions cannot stand up -- because in relation to the ideal the strongest stand in need of grace just as much as the weakest. And in a certain sublime sense the ideal transforms all distinctions in perfection between man and man into a jest. Christianity did not come in order to develop the heroic virtues in the individual but rather to remove selfishness and establish love -- "Let us love one another." Time and energy are not to be used for improving oneself up to a certain maximum, which can so easily be selfishness, as much as for working for others. But this, again, can be taken in vain so that one completely forgets his own development in activity for others. Then



the intensity must be accentuated again (JP, #991 [brackets mine]).

Besides the clarification this passage presents respecting the idea that, in Christianity, God figures as the middle term in all the believer's relations, it also alludes to an important difference between Socrates and Kierkegaard, which we have discussed earlier. That is, the historical fact that Socrates could not have known anything about Jesus of Nazareth, nor could he have been familiar with the early Christians' claims about him. We will return to this point in the comparison between Kierkegaard and Socrates, with reference to the question of criteria for the truth and the nature of human relationship to the truth.

Throughout his Journals and frequently in his autographic books, Kierkegaard utilizes much of Climacus's terminology, for example: "the absurd," "the leap of faith," "subjectivity," "inwardness," "earnestness," "the ethical" and "passion." However, if the reader were to take this verbal affinity to demonstrate a simple congruence of thought, she would be mistaken. For this overlap belies a significant difference.

Whereas Climacus treats Christian faith almost exclusively as a matter of interiority, Kierkegaard explores equally the individual Christian's call to manifest her Christianity in an unsympathetic world.

N.B. N.B. To be a Christian involves a double danger. First, all the intense internal suffering involved in becoming a Christian, this losing human reason and being

crucified on the paradox. --This is the issue *Concluding Postscript* presents as ideally as possible. Then the danger of the Christian's having to live in the world of secularity and here express that he is a Christian. Here belongs all the later productivity... (JP, #493).

The overlap between the two authors' work lies in their emphasis upon the individual's appropriation of the ethical aspect of the doctrine. That is, they both emphasize the difference between speculative and personally relevant truths vis-a-vis the claims of Christianity.

"There is only one proof that the Eternal exists: faith in it" (PH, p. 84).<sup>1</sup>

The inadequacy of Climacus's treatment lies in the idea that, apart from actual striving to imitate the Pattern of the truth (the Christ) in everyday life, the Christian's religio-ethical consciousness remains in suspense. In his treatment of Socrates and Christianity, Climacus attempts to clarify only the inward movements of subjective interest. In his treatment of the Christian tradition, Kierkegaard attempts to elucidate the bond between the individual's inward movements and her outward activities.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Away with all this world history and reasons and proofs for the truth of Christianity: there is only one proof -- that of faith. If I actually have a firm conviction (and this, to be sure, is a qualification of intense inwardness oriented to spirit), then to me my firm conviction is higher than reasons; it is actually the conviction which *sustains* the reasons, not the reasons which sustain the conviction. ...It is impossible, then, for a person to hold back his conviction and push ahead with the reasons. ...There is only one proof for the truth of Christianity -- the inward proof, *argumentum spiritus sancti*" (JP, #3608).

Ah, if thou wouldst have to do with Him, it is thou that art thereby put absolutely under obligation to obey and to serve Him (CD, p. 176).

The autographic presentation of the practical side of Christian faith should come as no surprise to the reader. For, as we have already noted, Kierkegaard's admiration for Socrates comprised respect as much for Socrates's honest introspection, as for the integrity of his behaviour, in accord with the conclusions of his introspection.

It is entirely consistent for Socrates to desire no followers, for he does not understand himself to be the truth for anyone else. In contrast to him, it is entirely consistent of the Christ to command obedience and, therefore, followers. For he presents himself as the truth for God's chosen people. Writing about the strenuous requirements of Christian existence, Kierkegaard could not neglect that facet of Jesus' proclamation, which called for imitation.

To exist Christianly is a compound of the eternal and of the temporal. But now in these times the eternal is never supposed to gain decisive expression in the external world -- therefore the whole thing may easily become a deception, a fancy. One acts as worldly as possible, clings to this earthly existence -- but is also, as they say, inwardly a true Christian. No doubt it is possible on rare occasions to find someone who truly achieves the astonishing harmony of the secular mentality and Christianity. Usually it is the Christian part which is left out, almost as if it were supposed to be merely an assimilated element of the secular mentality. ...Just as the poetry in life has been completely banished with the aid of the lie about assimilated elements (every girl sorrows just as deeply as Juliet, but, in addition, she understands how to bear it and then gets engaged again -- lies! Pure lies!) -- in the same way Christianity is banished by the fraud that the highest

is not to forsake or give up the worldly, etc., but to remain in it and in one's hidden inwardness to be a Christian (JP, #949).

Climacus's emphasis upon the individual's "infinite personal passionate concern for her eternal happiness" might explain why he does not address the question of the individual believer's obligation to serve her neighbours out of love. Understood abstractly, the idea of an eternal happiness does not clearly require strenuous effort on the believer's part in the direction of temporal and finite concerns; unless, of course, her eternal happiness is understood to be contingent upon a good performance of, for example, her duty to love her neighbours, as she might express this in particular works of love.

Clearly, such contingency is not compatible with the teleological suspension of the ethical, as we now understand that term in connection with the individual's sin and God's forgiveness of her sin. Insofar as this might be Climacus's understanding, it would be compatible with Kierkegaard's.

This does not mean that, for the sake of consistency, the only alternative to the hidden inwardness of faith must be some trite notion of works-righteousness. Rather, it means that any Christian, in her apparently ethical striving (that is, any effort on her part to imitate and obey the Christ by striving to reflect the love of God through loving the created cosmos and her fellow human beings), must actually pursue a route towards the truth, but with no confidence in her own capacity to attain to the

goal. In other words, where the believer's motive to imitate Christ is submission and not autonomous self-development, it is clear that her effort is not ethical, in the strict sense.

Otherwise, we are led to the conclusion, that Climacus's idea of "hidden inwardness" is entirely consistent with Christianity's promise of an eternal happiness for the believer -- in which case the familiar contradiction arises, between the individual's capacity to sustain said inwardness and the teleological suspension of ethical capability.

Apart from this possible difficulty, Climacus's construal of Christian faith poses another problem. If, by hidden inwardness and for the sake of her own eternal happiness, the believer is supposed to direct her attention towards her personal conception of her need for God, then this implies a split between her conception of her need, and her interest in maintaining that passionate sense of need for the sake of the reward.

Kierkegaard addresses this point in his series of reflections for the occasion of Confession, entitled *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*.<sup>1</sup> In this piece, he catalogues a plethora of possible evasions and self-deceptions which a so-called penitent believer might bring,

---

<sup>1</sup> Published March 13, 1847, along with two other sets of discourses, under the title: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits. The other two sets of discourses were *Consider the Lilies* and *Gospel of Sufferings*.

alongside of her contrition, to the office of Confession, and which actually serve to implicate her further in her double-mindedness of sin.

He argues that the Christian's decision to believe is the same as her decision to submit to the authority of God. Her submission to the revelations of her sin and of the forgiveness of her sin is not separable from her submission to Jesus' example of sacrificial love.

The decision is, to be willing to do all for the Good; it is not cleverly to wish to have the advantage of the Good. Alas, there is in every man a power, a dangerous and at the same time a great power. This power is cleverness. Cleverness strives continually against the commitment. It fights for its life and its honour, for if the decision [to submit] wins, then cleverness [specifically, the cleverness of evasion] is as if put to death -- degraded to become a despised servant whose talk is attentively listened to, but whose advice one does not stoop to follow (PH, pp. 126-127 [brackets mine]).

This does not mean that the Christian relinquishes her responsibility to assess possibilities and choose what way she might pursue in the interest of love. Rather, her cleverness receives a new, absolute charter for the application of its acumen. "The only genuine cleverness is that which helps a man in all devotedness truly to will the Good" (PH, p. 141). In Works of Love, Kierkegaard masterfully combines reflections upon the traditional Christian teachings about love, with admonitions for the reader to apply what she has understood.

It is a consistent theme in the works, that disinterested or merely relatively interested reasoning

alone cannot ground the individual's direction in life absolutely; only a leap of passionate understanding, which is of an ethical nature, can do that. For the believer, faith is the passion of willing submission. In this sense, faith decisively qualifies the individual's decision to become a Christian. Insofar as "becoming a Christian" is a qualification for her entire life, the categories and specifications of Christian existence, as she understands these, give substantive content to her conviction as she attempts to work this out in her everyday living. It is important not to ignore the reasonable coherence of the Christian ideal form of life. Considered apart from his role as Saviour, the Christ's role as Lord and pattern for the believer provides her with an authoritative, external standard, against which she may attempt to assess her submission.

Of course, the danger remains, that the believer might choose contrary to her earlier decision to submit; this is the constant possibility for sin in the realm of freedom. Here we must briefly consider Kierkegaard's understanding of the place of freedom in human existence. In his Journals, he provides a pregnant passage on this question in terms of theodicy.

The whole question of the relation of God's omnipotence and goodness to evil (instead of the differentiation that God accomplishes the Good and merely permits the evil) is resolved quite simply in the following way. The greatest good, after all, which can be done for a being, greater than anything else that one can do for it, is to make it free. In order to do just that, omnipotence is required. ...[I]f

one will reflect on omnipotence, he will see that it also must contain the unique qualification of being able to withdraw itself again in a manifestation of omnipotence in such a way that precisely for this reason that which has been originated through omnipotence can be independent. ...It is incomprehensible that omnipotence is not only able to create the most impressive of all things -- the whole visible world -- but is able to create the most fragile of all things -- a being independent of that very omnipotence (JP, #1251).

With this conception of freedom underlying much of his writing, it is not surprising how urgently Kierkegaard stresses the importance of earnest decisions as to how one ought to live.

Kierkegaard shares with Climacus the idea that individuals are free to choose their respective pursuits. On this point, however, the distinction between the pursuit of objective and subjective knowledge is entirely too abstract to apply directly to any actual individual as her choice for life. Climacus alludes to this where he mocks great professors, who, in momentary absent-mindedness, get themselves married, only then to embark again with objective seriousness to contribute a paragraph or two to the never-ending "System." As for Kierkegaard, apart from his own objective interest in observing and drawing conclusions from the behaviour of others, he could not possibly have pursued his edifying project in the authorship.

In the light of this common sense understanding of balance between objective knowledge and the subjective motivations behind many claims to knowledge, it is striking



how strongly Kierkegaard castigates the pursuit of knowledge in the natural sciences.

It does no good to get involved with the natural sciences. We stand there defenseless and utterly without control. The researcher immediately begins to distract us with his particular projects -- now to Australia, then to the moon, then into an underground crevice, then the devil knows where -- looking for an intestinal worm. Now we use the telescope -- now the microscope. Who in the devil can stand that! Joking aside, let us talk earnestly. The confusion lies in the fact that it never becomes dialectically clear which is which, how philosophy is to use natural science. Is the whole thing an ingenious metaphor (then one might as well be ignorant of it), is it an example, an analogy, or is it of such importance that *philosophical* theory should be revised in relation to it. ...But it is easy to see that this is simply skepticism (for skepticism means that an unknown, an X, explains everything. When everything is explained by an X which is not explained, then, viewed as a whole, nothing at all is explained). If this is not skepticism, then it is superstition (JP, #2820).

But we should understand Kierkegaard's complaint less on the basis of this argument, than on his grounds for making it. Like Climacus, his interest is in elucidating Christian categories. Kierkegaard's penitent disposition towards Christianity explains the passion with which he seeks to defend those categories against the rising tide of confidence in empiricism.

Christianity teaches that there is a conflict between God and man. And natural science is the most conceited of all, and, please note, in the direction of mutiny against God (note: that there are indeed some humble and devout natural scientists is another matter; my concern is particularly with that whole class of society which appeals to natural science), probably boasting of their experiments to which nature responds, probably boasting of their computations and predictions and the like, thus *either* wanting to make God completely superfluous and to substitute natural laws which -- since the natural scientists have made such incomparable progress -- must most humbly obey science, consequently man, so that man really becomes God, or they force God, so

painfully embarrassed, into his own laws, so that, if I dare say so, the devil himself must be God. The conflict between God and "man" will therefore culminate in the withdrawal of "man" behind natural science (JP, #2823).

He argues further that, where theologians attempt to make theology a science unto itself and respectable under the appraisal of the informed public, they err terribly. For theology properly has to do with the relation between God and humankind. Climacus and Kierkegaard agree that ethical, not objective, interest in Christianity must receive preeminence in the presentation of Christianity. Otherwise, from the believer's perspective, the presentation amounts to a deception of the severest gravity.

Stick to the point, stick to the point; the watchword is stick to the point -- that is stick to the ethical. ...As soon as anything other than the ethical is even faintly accentuated in discussing the ethical, the discussion is no longer an ethical discussion of the ethical and there is the risk that this other factor will draw attention to itself and away from the ethical, thus if the men to whom the ethical is to be addressed assume that the earth stands still and the sun goes around it -- this is of no importance whatsoever if the discussion is to be ethical -- so infinitely important is the ethical -- this sort of thing must not be allowed to interfere in the slightest way. No, only the ethical is to be accentuated -- and as far as the ethical is concerned the natural sciences have really made no discoveries at all (JP, #2823).

Finally, in our comparison of Johannes Climacus and Kierkegaard, we may note that Kierkegaard agrees that, in Christianity, the individual comes closer to the truth than Socrates did. Once again, however, we should not understand his position on the basis of the type of argument Climacus

develops in the Postscript. We can recall his arguments to the effect that, in the face of a greater number a paradoxical claims, inward appropriation requires a greater degree of passion on the part of the individual, which guarantees an appropriation of a higher truth, according the axiom: the more subjectivity, the more truth. Rather, we must understand that Kierkegaard writes out of his own convictions and in the interest of honesty respecting the asserted convictions of most of his contemporaries.

Before we move on to consider Anti-Climacus's contribution to the authorship, we should note something about Climacus's place in the greater scheme.

At the time he produced the Postscript, Kierkegaard was convinced that pseudonymous indirection was the only legitimate way for him to communicate his doubts about the state of Christianity in Christendom to his contemporaries. That book was to have brought his authorship proper to a close. While the pseudonym does not claim to be a Christian, he lays out, often in a humourous vein, various misconceptions about Christianity, which his readers could hardly fail to recognize.

His repeated emphasis upon the difference between the grandiloquence of speculation and the comparative silence of Christian confession served to undermine the contemporary clergy's apparent wholesale acceptance of philosophical trends current in Germany, most notably Hegelianism. The structure of the book itself is suggestive

of a philosophical parody; an incipient attack upon speculation, from behind.

By virtue of his more obviously polemical-ironic bent in relation to Christianity, Johannes Climacus occupies a place in the structure of the authorship closer to Kierkegaard's position than does Johannes de Silentio. The fact that his Postscript includes a summary treatment of all the pseudonymous works, excluding Anti-Climacus's two books, indicates that Kierkegaard initially assumed his role would be one of consummation.

Whereas Kierkegaard originally understood Climacus's work to be the completion of his project of edification, Anti-Climacus's role was as a mediator between Kierkegaard and bishop Mynster. We should expand on this briefly.

Partially out of filial respect and in part born of hope, Kierkegaard always had respect for the bishop. As a self-consciously polemical man, one of his greatest concerns was to avoid speaking out of turn in matters of religious authority. Despite all the misconceptions and deceptions he perceived to infect the church of his day, he did not believe that he had been given the authority to reprimand the ecclesial establishment directly. "I am without authority; far be it from me to judge any person" (SE, p. 17). The bishop was in the proper place to encourage the entire church to seek its integrity in honest confession.

Publishing his ideal conceptions of Christian existence under this special pseudonym, who, according to

Kierkegaard, possessed the confidence to declare himself to be a Christian to an extraordinary degree, he sought to provide the bishop an opportunity to respond humbly and repentantly to the absolute requirement of his office. In this way, he aimed to avoid the spectacle and misunderstanding of any historical conflict between himself and Mynster. In spite of his intentions, as he relates the details in his Journals, the bishop was recalcitrant in his repudiation of Training in Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

This was a matter of deep significance to Kierkegaard. In several entries in his Journals, he reflects on the question of the role of the new pseudonym and on the proper ascription of the authorship of Training. In the end, he inserted a couple of references to 'Magister Kierkegaard,' for the sake of maintaining ideal distance between himself and Anti-Climacus. Later, he wrote that, had he waited until after the bishop had died, he would have published the book autographically.

Upon Mynster's death, professor Martensen of the theology faculty produced a glowing eulogy for him, in which he asserted that the bishop was the last in a holy chain of genuine witnesses to the truth, which stretched back to the first century believers. This hollow triumph prompted Kierkegaard to write:

---

<sup>1</sup> See especially JP, #6853 and #6854: *My Relationship to Bishop Mynster in the Shortest Possible Resumé*.

"[I]f from the pulpit Bishop Mynster is to be depicted and canonized as a witness to the truth, one of the genuine witnesses to the truth, then a protest must be made" (from *This has to be said*, etc. in AC, p. 6).

In the article, he did not argue, *ad hominem*, that Mynster had presented himself in such a light. Rather, he criticized Martensen for so ignoring the obvious truth to the contrary, and accused the professor of attempting to capitalize on the opportunity to maintain a sense of decorum, respectability and comfort for the post, which, incidentally, he soon accepted.

Throughout Training, Anti-Climacus's allusions to the church leadership at the time of his writing are unmistakable. Despite this congruity, his approach to the matter is most notably different from Kierkegaard's, in that his own Christianity does not come into question. He does not write penitently; he writes to instruct and admonish. This difference sharpens the distinction between the pseudonym and Kierkegaard. For Anti-Climacus's confidence does not reflect the merest hint or possibility of despair on his part. His Christianity is as poetic (ideal, fantastic, etc.) as he is himself.

In contrast to this, by virtue of the possibilities of human freedom and, more specifically, his own melancholy disposition, Kierkegaard was always prone to some degree of despair. This difference becomes clear in his autographic writing about the possibility of despair and offense.

Unlike the pseudonym's discussion of it, his is  
compassionate and familiar.

But can something [such as the consciousness of sin and forgiveness] that is intended to humble -- can it be too lofty? Or if someone feels it to be too lofty for him, is it not because he has placed himself in a wrong relation to it so that by putting himself in a wrong place he receives the pressure in a wrong place and the requirement crushes him instead of humbly exerting a pressure that lifts up in joy over and in bold confidence through *grace*? Ah, you who are tried and tested this way -- I certainly need to hear what you have to say, and you do not need to hear what I have to say, but just suppose it is so and allow me to speak. ...In the physical world it is indeed the case that lifting can be done by means of a weight -- thus if someone mistakenly thought he was supposed to lift the weight instead of being lifted by the weight -- well, then he is crushed. But it would not be due to the weight but to him. So it is with the unconditional requirement; if I am supposed to lift it, I am crushed. But this is not the intention of the Gospel. Its intention is that by means of the requirement and my humiliation I shall be lifted, believing and worshiping -- and then I am as light as a bird. ...[I]n order to worship God properly and to have the proper joy from worshiping, a person must conduct himself in this way: he must strive with all his might, spare himself neither night nor day; he must accumulate, and the more the better, what people of integrity, speaking humanly, would call good deeds. And when he then takes them and deeply humbled before God sees them transformed into something miserable and base -- this is what it is to worship God -- and this is a lifting up (JY, pp. 153, 154).

Granted, this is a long excerpt, but it clearly demonstrates both Kierkegaard's humbler, more personal tone with his reader, and the similarity between his and Anti-Climacus's conceptions of faith.

That is, in faith, the believer must endure the humiliation of the contrast between the ideal requirement, in which she earnestly places her hope, and the consciousness of her failing to measure up to it. In Anti-

Climacus's terms, she must not despair over her sin, for thereby she would take the full weight of its consequences upon herself; and she must not despair of the forgiveness of her sin, for thereby she would deny the very nature of the truth to which she had initially attached herself in her desire for it.

As we observed in our comparison of Kierkegaard and Climacus on the question of the new place of the ethical in Christian existence, in connection to Anti-Climacus's presentation too, we find Kierkegaard elucidating the same idea: that outward Christian striving does not self-sufficiently precede grace, but rather, out of grateful obedience follows upon it. The believer's desire to obey ensues by virtue of the believer's joy over the reconciliation of forgiveness; this it is which produces an honest striving (paraphrase from JP, #983).

Of course, the *honesty* of Christian striving is perceptible only to the Christian. For it is predicated upon the individual's consciousness of the divine conviction of her own sinfulness. In view of that acknowledgement, any other type of striving would seem to her vain and desperate.

According to our study of Anti-Climacus's Sickness Unto Death, we noted that the individual's sin amounts to wilfull disobedience. Entirely regardless of her conscious intent to be insubordinate toward God, she is accountable in eternity for any misrelation in herself.



Kierkegaard focusses his interest in sin upon individual responsibility in the face of the imperative of Christianity: that everyone *shall* believe. For him, every misunderstanding and misconstrual of the task of individual Christians in Christendom centers on this imperative.

The way to Christianity is not that another person by coaxing, etc., undertakes to lead you to it. No, you must go through this "You *shall*"; this is the condition for *unconditional* respect. And behind this *you shall* lies grace, and there everything smiles, there all is gentleness (JP, #994).

Kierkegaard argues that the absolute confronts all relativities of understanding, interest and distraction full in the face. Respecting relative distractions, it is clear from our discussion that the individual is responsible for her use of freedom, even where she habitually ignores herself in immediacy. In this way, any occasion of distraction from earnest appropriation of that truth which is absolute for her, constitutes the individual's forfeiture of her self in its highest possible sense, that is: before God, in relating to herself, to will to be herself by resting transparently in God.

Her willing to be herself naturally includes her striving to relate to herself, others and God in a manner consistent with her conception of herself. Clearly, she could not develop a Christian conception of herself apart from her introspection and her various interactions with others and with God. Kierkegaard shares the view that these

three relations are essentially bound together in human consciousness.

The one corresponds to the other: for no one can have a real conception of God without having a corresponding one about life and himself, nor can he have a real conception of himself without a similar one about God, and no real conception about life without a similar one about himself. A poetically creative imagination or a conception at the distance of an indifferent contemplation, is no real conception. Nor does the conception of God come as an accidental supplement to the conception of life and of oneself; on the contrary it comes and crowns the whole, interpenetrating everything, and it was present before it became manifest (TD, p. 68).

Respecting relative interests, in his Christian Discourses, he writes of the "anxieties of the heathen," that everyone who lacks a disposition of faith towards the absolute is disposed to bow to them. Among other things, this analysis implicates the social elevation of civic and national authorities to the helm of human society as idolatry. For the citizen learns to depend upon the institutions of government, and its asservations as to her rights under it, for everything which it deems essential to her existence. In contrast, the goal of the Christian's life, according to the rule that she ought not to have anxiety for the morrow, frees her entirely from diverse immediate and imagined concerns for "security."

All earthly and worldly anxiety is at bottom anxiety for the next day. Earthly and worldly anxiety is rendered possible by the fact that man, compounded of the temporal and the eternal, became a self; but in becoming a self the next day became existent for him. And here it is fundamentally that the battle is fought. ...The next day is the first link of the chain which fetters a man in a gang with thousands to that superfluous anxiety which is of the evil one. ...[B]ut

if for thee there is no next day, then all earthly anxiety is annihilated -- and not only the anxiety about subsistence, for everything earthly and worldly is desirable only for the sake of the next day . . . and is uncertain by reason of the next day; the next day it loses its enchantment and its anxious uncertainty. And if for thee there is no next day, thou art either a dying man, or one who by dying to the temporal hast grasped the eternal, either one who really is dying or one who *really* lives (CD, pp. 74-75).

Respecting relative understandings, we may consider his treatment of erotic love in Works of Love. There he writes that: "*Worldly wisdom thinks that love is a relationship between man and man. Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between: man - God - man, that is, that God is the middle term*" (WL, pp. 112-113). In the love that exists between human beings, comparisons and degrees of favouritism are common. In the Christian love between individuals, the matter of degree is a *non sequitur*.

For the poet can have no more to do with the Christian demand to love one's enemy any more, even less if less were possible, than he can have anything to do with the Christian demand to hate the beloved out of love and in love. . . . [Where such a collision occurs,] love means precisely to hold fast to the true, eternal conception and to love in the power of this conception, although the one or ones who are loved, if they have a merely human concept, may regard it as hate (WL, pp. 114, 115).

Here, again, we have come to the point that Kierkegaard considers reason and faith to be antithetical *only* where the individual's faith does not condition her application of reason to the tasks of faith. Equally as for his construal of the possibility for the antithesis of the two, so again for his sense of their ideal compatibility in

consciousness, the pursuit of truth comprises the arena for the interaction of reason and faith.

Have faith, and the rest is of no consequence. Every other good is dialectical in such a way that there is always an *aber* about it, so that seen from another side it perhaps is not a good. Faith is the Good which is dialectical in such a way that even if the greatest misfortune were to happen to me, faith would still allow me to regard it as good (JP, #957).

This understanding lies at the heart of his contention against the state of official Christianity in Christendom. For the religious establishment seemed to Kierkegaard to be at least as concerned for its material well-being and social respectability as it was for the proclamation of the Gospel. In its concern for material comfort, it was as prone to the calamities of war, pestilence and economic hardship as the civil authority was. Such concern led to double-mindedness in its commission to endure all suffering for the sake of the truth.

As well, it reflects on his understanding of his task as an author: that he ought, as he was qualified, only to point his readers in the direction of clarity respecting the difference between Christian faith and any of the popular trends in Christendom, which, from his point of view, mistakenly passed for legitimate aspects of a Christian society, namely: speculative extravagance, esthetical distraction and ethical idolatry.

As he points out in Judge For Yourself!, despair in Christendom most commonly took the form of incredulity in

the face of the very idea of an absolute criterion for human existence.

'No one can serve two masters.' These are the words of the Gospel. Eternally unchanged they are repeated: No one can serve two masters. But since no person has ever done this, is it not finally mankind's reasonable request that the requirement be changed, be toned down? And because less enlightened ages have put up with this order of things, the unreasonableness of which they were unable to perceive, and because the human race in its timorous state, when it bore the only all too deep stamp of being browbeaten under the Law, has not dared breathe a word, does it follow that enlightened, liberal, cultured ages, or in any case -- for there certainly is still a large segment of people who are both unenlightened and timorous -- does it follow that an enlightened, liberal, most honorable cultured public ought to put up with the same thing? To require the unconditioned of human beings is basically madness, a ludicrous exaggeration that like all extremes, as any sensible person easily sees, takes revenge by producing an effect the very opposite of what it aimed at. All human wisdom consists in this glorious and golden principle: to a certain degree, there is a limit, or in this "both-and," "also"; the unconditioned is madness. The mark of mature earnestness is precisely this: it insists that the requirement shall be of such a nature that a person can with pleasure and satisfaction amply meet it through steady effort. Obviously, what none of us has done none of us, of course, can do; and if none of us can do it, then the requirement must be changed according to what we have shown we can do by having done it -- more cannot be required. Therefore, we insist on a Christianity that can be brought into harmony with all the rest of our life, corresponding to the change that has occurred in the human race through increasing enlightenment and culture and liberation from all unworthy pressures, or at least in what amounts to the main stem of the human race -- the cultured public (JY, pp. 154-155).

As we have observed several times already, Kierkegaard's situation was analogous to Socrates's in ancient Athens. In his advice to a young man, Kierkegaard demonstrates the same ironic flexibility as Socrates does in the *Apology*.

Young man, if you are extraordinarily gifted, there are two ways for you. Either use these gifts of yours to strengthen men in their darling stupidities and errors -- yet, please note, with the appearance of helping them toward truth and clarity -- and you will be idolized, earn honor and lots and lots of money, be poetized and praised, and at your grave many a eulogy will be drooled by the grief-stricken mourners. Or before God, aware of your responsibility, resolve by every sacrifice really to help them, if possible, at least a little along the way to clarity -- then take care. This will be rewarded undeservedly with scorn and indignities (out of stupidity and envy, the most dangerous collusion in the earthly sense, when the stupid do not understand you and those who are able to understand you collaborate with the stupid out of envy) -- perhaps even with your life (JP, #956).

Kierkegaard recognized that every individual is responsible to choose how she should live, that is, to choose that with which she shall concern herself in life. In the *Apology*, Socrates demonstrates that he shares that conviction.

After puzzling about [the oracle's answer to the question whether I was the wisest man] for some time, I set myself at last with considerable reluctance to check the truth of it...(*Apology*, 21 b).

He was obviously under no immediate compulsion by the god to prove himself to be the wisest; nevertheless, he chose to embark on "a sort of pilgrimage" to ascertain the veracity of the oracle's claim. Following his initial investigations, he learned that, by his human wisdom, he was able to dispossess other individuals of their allegedly sure knowledge of great mysterious virtues, such as justice and love.

As we have pointed out earlier, it was of significance to Kierkegaard that Socrates felt he was

pursuing the will of the god in his decision to continue to seek the truth in this way (see *Apology*, 23 b). Despite the resentment of some of his contemporaries towards his efforts, he persevered in his quest for clear knowledge of the truth. In dialogue, he was willing to find the truth expressed either by himself or by his partner. As proof for Kierkegaard that Socrates's efforts were of an ethical nature, his ultimate sacrifice of his life for the sake of the integrity of the state (suspect though that appears in the light of Socrates's trial), stood clearly as a testimony to his integral passion for the truth as he understood it.

Socrates refused to accept payment for his teaching. Similarly, Kierkegaard considered the payment motive a conflict of interest in connection with any communication that people pursue, at least ostensibly, for the sake of the truth.

The ethical expression for the distinction which an artist, a thinker, a teacher of ethics claims is that he himself surrender the money motive. Insofar as the money motive controls, I cannot make sense of the prudishness about the great difference between them and every other tradesman. ...But a teacher of ethics is not characterized by differences; the more money motivated he becomes, the more he becomes even less than an out-and-out tradesman (JP, #980).

By his example, Socrates left his contemporaries somewhat uncertain as to his motive. For apart from possessing similar ethical dispositions themselves, they could not truly understand him. Besides the absence of any money motive, his maieutic approach to the truth precluded

his involvement in regular pedagogy. The outcome of his calling was that, whomever he spoke with entered a process wherein she might end up losing her grip on what she had formerly held to be foundations of knowledge. Of course, Socrates was not to blame for these misconceptions; but, as he expresses elsewhere: sometimes his partners were positively ready to bite him out of indignation for his tampering with their naive security. Kierkegaard's experience of being misunderstood in Copenhagen -- a typical "market-town" as he often described it derisively -- led him to identify somewhat with Socrates. For he too upset the *status quo* in the world of self-confident idea mongers.

Socrates's pursuit of the truth constituted his own upbringing in the truth. As he learned consistently the appropriateness of ignorance in dialogue to flush out weak and vacillating "convictions," he honed his skill for the sake of the truth, and that hope comprised his gain. Whereas Socrates could speak of this in his defense, drawing upon his experiences in conversing with his contemporaries, Kierkegaard spoke in similar fashion with reference to his body of writing.

...I, the author, if I think of being in relation to the age, am far from calling myself the educator -- no, I myself am the one who has been educated or brought up. This is one of the reasons I have been so scrupulous about avoiding admiration, adherents, cheers, and other hoopla, for, good heavens, there is no point in shouting hurrah because someone is brought up and one certainly does not become an adherent of -- a disciple. On the other hand this is one of the reasons I have been willing to submit to all the very opposite; like a volunteer I have even risked becoming, alas, the poor "master of irony"! -- becoming a sacrifice to



laughter -- all of which is connected with being brought up, and one who is to be brought up and is willing can benefit greatly from it (JP, #2647).

We have yet to address the question of criteria for the truth. Perhaps it appears sad or strange that either Socrates or Kierkegaard, or both for that matter, might have been entirely mistaken about the truth. Against what criteria did Kierkegaard measure the truth?

Throughout this thesis, we have been answering this question. From his perspective, it is not his concern that Socrates did not know anything of Jesus of Nazareth, nor of the early Christians' claims about him. Repeatedly, Kierkegaard stresses the idea that, once taken to be the absolute truth, Christianity admits of no speculation upon the possibility of other, perhaps less strenuous, paths to follow to the truth. We have noted that the reward motive is contradictory to the desire to pursue the truth, for in that case the reward and not the Good itself constitutes the individual's *telos*. So, the truth, as it appears to be such to the believer, stands alone, without further incentive. For Kierkegaard, the truth existed in Christianity.

[T]o continue in the same vein as before, the immediately obvious mark of [the fact that nothing so offends sensibleness as the unconditioned] is that sensibleness will never unconditionally acknowledge any requirement but continually claims itself to be the one that declares what kind of requirement is to be made. Therefore, to insist that Christianity be abolished or to give up Christianity is in full agreement with this sensibleness. But is it a misunderstanding to insist that Christianity be changed? Christianity cannot be changed; precisely this shows once again that it is the very opposite of 'sensibleness,' the secret of which is its ability to be changed in every way on

every stroke of the clock, all in relation to what the times, the public, and profit crave, or as the wind and the leaves and the newspapers turn. No, Christianity cannot be changed; to insist on this is to attempt to change it, which is totally without effect -- indeed, just as a mountain would look at a child who came up to it and said, 'Get out of my way,' so Christianity must listen to this talk that demands of it the eternally impossible -- that it be changed (JY, p. 155 [brackets mine]).

If someone would like to pursue the question of Socrates's and Kierkegaard's relative criteria for the truth on Kierkegaard's terms, she could get no farther. According to Kierkegaard, Socrates is great because of his ethical integrity; but this is not something which was of greatest significance to him. For he had received the Christian proclamation about the Christ and accepted it. As he perceived it, his historical circumstance was not his responsibility, but his response to his world was.

Because primarily objective and esthetically interested knowledge are not compatible with the knowledge of faith, any analysis of Kierkegaard's position, which aims to take him seriously, will have either to admit its premises as basically incompatible with an understanding of his view vis-à-vis Socrates, or change its premise to one of subjective motivation, in which case the inquirer should quickly move away from Kierkegaard, towards a clearer understanding of herself and her duty to God.

What is Kierkegaard's answer to the question: "But how on earth does it occur to a person to subject himself to all this; why must he be a Christian when it is so hard?"

The first answer might be: Hold your tongue; Christianity is the absolute, you shall. But another answer may also be given: Because the consciousness of sin within him allows him no rest anywhere; its grief strengthens him to endure everything else if he can only find reconciliation. This means that the grief of sin must be very deep within a person, and therefore Christianity must be presented as the difficult thing it is, so that it may become entirely clear that Christianity only is related to the consciousness of sin. To want to be involved in becoming a Christian for any other reason is literally foolishness -- and so it must be (JP, #493).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Attack Upon 'Christendom'. Ed. and Trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. The Book on Adler. Ed. and Trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Christian Discourses and The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air and Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays. Trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. The Concept of Anxiety. Ed. and Trans. Reidar Thomte. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Trans. David F. Swenson, Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Edifying Discourses in 4 vols. Ed. and Trans. David F. Swenson, Lillian M. Swenson. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943-1946.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Either / Or 2 vols. Ed. and Trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Fear and Trembling and Repetition. Ed. and Trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourself! Ed. and Trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Gospel of Sufferings. Trans. A.S. Aldworth, W.S. Ferrie. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1982.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Johannes Climacus and Philosophical Fragments. Ed. and Trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Journals and Papers in 7 vols. Ed. and Trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-1978.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. The Point of View for My Work as An Author: A Report to History and Two Notes about 'The Individual' and My Activity as A Writer. Ed. Benjamin Nelson. Trans. Walter Lowrie. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing. Trans. Douglas V. Steere. New York: Harper & Row, 1956.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. The Sickness Unto Death. Trans. Alastair Hannay. London: Penguin Books, 1989.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. The Sickness Unto Death. Ed. and Trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Stage On Life's Way. Ed. and Trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Thoughts on Crucial Situations in Human Life: Three Discourses on Imagined Situations in Human Life. Trans. David F. Swenson. Ed. Lillian M. Swenson. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Training in Christianity. Trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.
- Kierkegaard, Soren A. Works of Love. Trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- Lowrie, Walter. Kierkegaard in 2 vols. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1970.
- Plato. Collected Dialogues. Ed. Edith Hamilton, Huntington Cairns. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.