KIERKEGAARD ON UNDERSTANDING AND INDIRECT COMMUNICATION

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

September 1981

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MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE (1981) McMaster University
(Philosophy) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Kierkegaard on Understanding and Indirect Communication

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SUPERVISOR: Professor G.B. Madison

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 176

ABSTRACT

Difficult and important interpretative problems arise in a careful reading of Kierkegaard's texts that do not normally arise in reading the texts of authors who go about their writing in a more direct and straightforward. These difficulties are occassioned by Kierkegaard's tactical employment of indirect communication. Indirect communication forces a reader to assume an active and participatory role in the reading of texts. It solicits a special kind of understanding. The kind of understanding it solicits requires effort and concern.

In this thesis Kierkegaard's point of view on understanding is explicated and applied in a reading of his texts. Indirect communication comes into its proper light when thought of as a stratedgy for bringing this sort of understanding about for a given reader. Kierkegaard's views on understanding are used to explain his employment of indirect communication and his views on indirect communication are used to explain his very interesting point of view on understanding.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent times we have been witness to a resurgence of interest in Søren Kierkegaard. In part this growing interest is to be attributed to the increased availability of his works in English translation, and in part to the fact that Kierkegaard is intrinsically interesting. Before passing judgement on the significance of this resurgence, it is useful to reflect upon two very different sorts of interest.

Of all things that command our interest, few are as interesting as the unusual. Unusual faces, unusual birds, unusual stories, unusual things of all sorts catch our interest. Sirens, flashing lights, torch-light processions, all have a certain interest for the reason that they are out of the ordinary. Imagine a man out for a walk. Perhaps he is thinking about what he will have for dinner, or perhaps about a certain task he has left undone. Suddenly the sound of a siren cuts into his stream of thought and immediately he finds himself interested. Not having a definite route planned for his walk, he moves in the direction of the siren. Turning a corner, the siren becoming louder and louder, he spies a crowd gathering further down the road. Interested, like the others, he moves into the crowd. Peering over a shoulder, he discerns the figure of a small boy lying on the pavement, apparently injured by a car. His interest not yet satisfied, he moves closer. Suddenly, noticing the style and

colour of the boy's jacket, he acquires another sort of interest; his son has such a jacket. Rushing to the front of the crowd his dreadful suspicion is soon confirmed; the figure on the pavement is his son. This story clarifies the difference between the two sorts of interest alluded to above and says something about the transition from the first to the second. In Kierkegaard's language this transition would be described as being from the objective to the subjective. In a general sense this thesis is an attempt to clarify this transition.

If nothing else, Kierkegaard is an interesting figure. Unusual in his physical appearance, he is unusual as well in his life and authorship. His oddity has even attracted the interest of a number of psychiatrists who, like ornithologists flocked together to dissect a strange and rare bird, have dissected his biography in order to uncover the conditions that produced such a freak. This interest is certainly natural, but falls victim to Kierkegaard's irony. This irony stems from the fact that he takes special caution to keep his biography out of sight so as to avoid distracting his reader from attending to the communication. He is careful not to intrude his personality in such a way as to draw attention to himself and away from the direction of the subject matter. His authorship has a definite purpose, the discharge of which requires his reader's undivided attention.

The thesis here expounded is that Kierkegaard's authorship is properly understood only when interpreted in

light of its stated purpose. This is not the only way to understand it, but it is the most fruitful. This is demonstrated at first hand in this text, which is itself an interpretation of Kierkegaard's authorship according to its purpose. Because the authorship is so carefully composed, it comes into its proper light only when the purpose informing its design is adverted to. This interpretative principle is given due consideration in the first chapter in which the role of purpose in the composition and interpretation of texts is discussed.

What is the purpose of Kierkegaard's authorship? Simply stated, it is to introduce Christianity into Christendom. Simply stated, but by no means simple. The difficulty is that those in Christendom are not merely ignorant about Christianity, but in fact misunderstand it. This misunderstanding is confused with the proper understanding. What is first of all necessary then is the removal of the misunderstanding. To this end it is important to be especially clear about two things: the nature of the misunderstanding and the requirements for the proper understanding. The second chapter attempts to clarify these things.

When one is concerned not simply about communicating something, but about communicating it in such a way as to facilitate a certain kind of understanding, the form of the communication becomes very important. One must concern oneself not only with what is to be said, but also with how

it is to be said. Kierkegaard's strategy of indirect communication arises out of such concern. In the third chapter indirect communication is interpreted as being strikingly appropriate for the purpose behind Kierkegaard's authorship.

Very little is said about Kierkegaard's religious works in this thesis, but from time to time passages from them are discussed in order to highlight or clarify a point being made. The reason for this exclusion is simple; these works are simple enough to understand that they do not require the sophisticated kind of interpretation necessary for the other works. They communicate their meaning in a direct and straightforward way. Being simple, they are not for that reason unimportant. In the end the importance of Kierkegaard's other works is that they prepare their reader for the simple and honest reading of religious texts. In the end, it is not the scholarship that matters.

I

TWO KINDS OF AUTHORS

> For though it is indeed by writing that one justifies the claim to be an author, it is also, strangely enough, by writing that one virtually renounces this claim. (Authority and Revelation, 4)

The specific character of Kierkegaard's authorship poses certain problems for one who is about to begin a serious study. Texts authored pseudonymously, provocations concerning secrecy and deception, exhortations about offense and paradox, signal that something more is going on than is obvious at first glance and arouse even the most somnulent reader to an attitude of suspicion and mistrust with regard to the merely apparent. The encounter with these perplexities has the effect of arresting the reader who attempts to make sense of the authorship directly and straightforwardly. A naive and uncritical beginning is thwarted and occasion is given for the reader to take pause and begin again slowly and cautiously.

This thesis begins with a preliminary consideration of Kierkegaard's remarks on authorship. Such a beginning is justified since these remarks about authorship in general serve as fruitful interpretive clues by which to interpret his own works. Instead of proceeding immediately and directly to what Kierkegaard is trying to get at, a detour is made through considerations of how he goes about his work as an author. There are scattered remarks throughout all of his

works pertaining to authorship, but two works stand out as having this subject as their expressed theme: The Point of View for My Work as An Author and Authority and Revelation.[2] For tactical reasons discussion of the former is postponed until the terminal point of this thesis and a beginning is made with consideration of the latter.

Authority and Revelation was written within several years of the publication of Concluding Unscientific Postscript in which Kierkegaard claims responsibility for the pseudonymous works and announces the end of his authorship.[3] This places its composition contiguous with The Point of View, and like it, it was deliberately left unpublished until after his death. It is a revealing work and is of interest for a number of reasons, two worth special mention. In the first place, it provides us with a valuable distinction between two kinds of authors. These two, premise-authors and essential authors, are in marked contrast to each other and the former is used as a foil by means of which to understand the latter. They are opposed to each other in a number of ways, but most importantly in term of how each begins his authorship. The premise-author begins immediately without reflecting upon the overall context surrounding his communication, whereas the essential author initially undertakes such reflection and begins his communication with a definite purpose in mind. Each sort of beginning is significant in that each gives rise to a different sort of text which in turn requires its own sort of interpretation.

The former is exemplified by a Magister Adler who serves as the butt of Kierkegaard's polemic. The latter, as the text indirectly intimates, is exemplified by Kierkegaard himself. This distinction proves to be fruitful in coming to understand Kierkegaard's authorship.

In the second place, this text is of interest insofar as it throws a certain light on the relationship between an author and his audience, a relationship which is extremely important for Kierkegaard. As well as functioning as a foil for clarifying what is typical of essential authors, Adler serves as an epigram for the confusion of the present age. Given that Kierkegaard conceives his authorship as being a corrective to this confusion, Adler indirectly reveals his intended audience.

Premise-authors

> But everyone should keep silent insofar as he has no understanding to communicate. (Authority and Revelation,9)

For the orientation of the reader, a few preliminary remarks concerning Adler's situation in general should suffice as an overview. Adler was an ordained minister in the Danish Church, and as such one of whom a clear understanding of basic Christian concepts could reasonably be expected. Having completed the requisite theological studies and being comfortably set up in a modest parish, Adler attracted the attention of the Church authorities with the publication of a collection of sermons in which he claimed to have been gifted with a revelation.

The authorities responded to Adler's extraordinary claim quite predictably with a request for clarification and explanation. Thus begins Adler's correspondence with the authorities. This correspondence is in the form of a series of carefully worded and targeted questions submitted to Adler by the authorities, each followed by a response from Adler. This format is not unlike that of a Platonic dialogue, in which Socrates can be seen interrogating his interlocutor, calling upon him to account for his stated use or definition of a given word. It is useful to keep this parallel in mind when following the correspondence.

Kierkegaard provides a detailed account of this exchange but here it is enough to outline certain essential points. Proceeding e concessis, under the assumption that what Adler says is true, Kierkegaard fouses his attention on Adler's responses and provides an interesting and penetrating commentary on them.[4] For example, he makes the observation that Adler's responses to the questions posed to him are unnecessarily equivocal and elusive. To a simple question as to whether or not he recognized that he was in "an exalted and confused state of mind" when he wrote and published his texts, Adler responded:

> "Since I can point out meaning and connection in what I have written in my Sermons and Studies, I do not recognize that I was in an exalted and confused state of mind when I wrote them."(Authority and Revelation, 72)

Kierkegaard points out that this is not, strictly considered, an

answer to the question (72). "Meaning and connection" may very well be present in a text that is confused. Furthermore, Kierkegaard charges, "there are many passages in the Sermons which are plainly wanting in meaning and connection"(73). Kierkegaard concludes that Adler is deliberately evasive, not unlike the drunken man who claims to be sober on the evidence that he can enunciate a complete sentence without slurring. Perhaps he can, but this alone will not suffice to establish his soberness, especially when he falls down uttering it.

Even more noteworthy than his equivocation is his lack of continuity and consistency. In consecutive restatements of his position, he alters his meaning, but without decisively acknowledging the alteration. Having made the claim that he had received "from the Saviour by a revelation a doctrine entrusted to him," in response to specific questions raised by the authorities he alters his claim to that of having been "rescued in a miraculous way" (80-81). It would have been quite admissible for Adler to alter his position if he were to recognize the alteration and assume responsibility for it, but this is precisely what he fails to do.

> He does not hold fast his first decisive declaration, he alters it, and yet he would give that alteration the appearance of being an explanation. That he does not stand fast by what he said of himself in the preface to the Sermons (the point of the authority's question) it is not difficult to see; for after all there is a decisive qualitative difference between receiving from the Saviour by a revelation a doctrine entrusted to him, and being rescued in a miraculous way. (80-81)

Kierkegaard does not fault Adler for having altered his position, but for failing to admit that he has done so.

Questioned further by the authorities about his "revelation" Adler equivocates once again. The words he claimed previously had been imparted to him in a revelation he now refers to as "points of reference which were necessary to me at the beginning of the enthusiasm" (87). One need not be an ordained minister to understand that there is a qualitative difference between a revelation and a moment of enthusiasm but apparently Adler lacks such understanding since he accounts for the same experience under both categories without revoking one from the standpoint of the other. Commenting on this inconsistency, Kierkegaard writes:

> So Adler has been in a state of enthusiasm. Yes, that is something different. In case Adler in the preface to his Sermons, instead of what stands there now, had written:"In a moment of enthusiasm at night a light appeared to me, whereupon I stood up and lit a lamp and wrote down the following words"—then perhaps it hardly would have occurred to the authority to call him to account with questions. (89)

Having been called upon to account for a claim quite out of the ordinary, Adler's failure to do so responsibly led to his eventual deposition.

Given Adler's apparent inability to account for himself, Kierkegaard takes licence to construct his own interpretative account. In working out a diagnosis, he concentrates on the transitions that mark the initiation of each new beginning. He notes that Adler makes transitions, yet without acknowledging the fact that a transition has been,

even where it is obvious to anyone looking at the evidence. He fails to bring his consecutive texts into relation with each other. Thus each explanation of his position he offers is like a new beginning. Kierkegaard writes about Adler's first explanation of his controversial claim:

> Naturally, it is no explanation of the preface, it is an entirely new view, a new character in which Adler appears upon the stage, as though he were just now beginning, as though he had no antecedent history—he who precisely had antecedents about which the question was asked. In case one had given himself out to be king, and then the authority put to him the question what he meant by saying such a thing about himself, and he then explained that thereby he had meant that he was a councilor of chancery—this answer is no explanation, it is a new assertion: first he gives himself out to be king, then councilor of chancery. (82)

It would not be confusing if the same person first announcing himself as king later announced himself to be councilor of chancery, provided some explanation was available. If a king, perhaps through some misfortune, were to become councilor of chancery, then one could understand this, although one might be shocked and surprised. Then the transition would be accounted for. It is otherwise with Adler, however, who wants to be both king and councilor at the same time. He makes two different beginnings, and in the second forgets the first.

This kind of discontinuity or schizophrenia is exhibited consistently throughout Adler's written works, which constitute a vast literary production. Kierkegaard finds it as well in Adler's Biblical exegesis which is fragmentary and dissonant.

> As one who in a rural spot, left entirely to himself, now in love with one impression, now with another, now with another, now making a spring for gladness, now a long leap for sheer pleasure, now again stands still and ponders, now is really profound, and then again is rather insipid and without flavour—thus does Adler dawdle as a reader of the Bible. When a Biblical text attracts him he writes something about it, and then he goes along another street; sometimes he makes a note of something for the sake of using it another time, but this too will be given up. (98)

The various connections between his commentaries are accidental and desultory. Each point is like a new beginning and is not brought into relation with what goes before it. Because the associations which link consecutive texts together are, apparently, of private significance only, Adler's reader is left helpless in trying to construe their meaning.

> It is well known that as a task for composition in the mother tongue one sometimes uses single disconnected words from which the pupils must form a connected sentence. So it is that Adler throws out quite abruptly brief clauses, sometimes meaningless, perhaps to give the reader an opportunity of practicing the composition of connected sentences. In other places he seemed to behave as if the reader did not exist, that is to say, as though what he wrote were not meant to be printed, but as though from time to time it had been written in a notebook and got printed through a misunderstanding. (135)

It is important to note that while Kierkegaard has an abhorrence for systems, he does not for that reason sanction chaos and confusion. He regards consistency and continuity as being very important for authorship, at least insofar as an author desires to have an audience.

Kierkegaard faults Adler for a number of things, but the thrust of his polemic can be succinctly expressed in a

single criticism: Adler begins prematurely. For example, given the sucoessive alterations his account of his revelation undergoes, and the wide range of meanings he assigns to the word "revelation", it is quite evident that Adler began to speak publicly about his revelation prior to having decided what he distinctly and definitely understood by this word. This puts his audience in a difficult position because his audience is left abandoned to sort out the various incongruities and to make connections between texts Adler leaves standing alone and unrelated. In light of Adler's inconsistencies, Kierkegaard is led to suspect that "he is in such confusion regarding the categories that he does not himself know what he says, because he associates no sharp thought with the words" (71). To speak about something prior to having come to some kind of conclusion or resolution as to what one understands pertaining to it is to begin prematurely. Had Adler begun by first asking himself what he understood by his claim to a revelation, this would have made it possible and indeed necessary for him to work for a resolute understanding. A resolute understanding would have served as a solid basis and decisive point of departure upon which to base a consistent account of his revelation. Had the starting point been firm, then what developed from it could have been understood in relation to it. As it is, Adler did not stand firm on any point.

Because Adler did not resolutely understand anything definite about revelation prior to his claim to having had

one, he did not begin at all, insofar as a beginning is thought of as the commencement of a continuous series. Lacking continuity, his texts are like a series of beginnings for which a conclusion is wanting, and therefore are not properly beginnings at all. In other words, Adler is to be faulted for having begun before the beginning.

> In case a man in this way, before he had gained enough clarity and ripeness to write a book (which he could not yet write) began to write the preface to the book, then would the preface come under the rubric fortuitous length. And this is precisely Adler's case as an author, that he began before the beginning. (97)

In this respect Adler resembles someone held by a compulsion who is constantly beginning to quit or give it up. Such beginnings come and go spasmodically, each forgetting the other, given that each arises prior to "the tug of the ideal resolution" (97).

Essentially what makes any of Adler's many beginnings premature is the absence of an anticipated conclusion. This is why Kierkegaard calls him a "premise-author". His various texts arise like uninterpreted premises without direction or anticipation of a conclusion to be drawn from them. He has not decided upon anything definite that he seeks to communicate, does not have a conclusion, does not know to what end he speaks.

> The premise-author feels no need to communicate himself, for essentially he has nothing to communicate: he lacks precisely the essential thing, the conclusion, the meaning in relation to the premises. (8)

It is the conclusion that provides connection and continuity

between various premises; it is the unifying factor. To begin a text without having arrived at a conclusion is tantamount to beginning before the beginning. Adler's premature beginnings are like premises thrown out to an audience and left for them to make sense of and interpret.

Because the premise-author is so impetuous in his beginning, because he does not stop to collect himself and to come to a resolute understanding, his communication shows a total disregard for his audience. It is because Adler set to work directly as an author that he missed the obvious. Had he reflected upon his course of action before executing it, he would have been able to anticipate the response of the authorities. Kierkegaard emphasizes the point that the authorities acted quite predictably. The fact that Adler was surprised by their response indicates that he failed to take his audience into account in the production of his texts. He left it to the authorities to conclude his directionless beginning. Lacking a conclusion which would add intelligibility to his otherwise desultory texts, he burdens his audience with the responsibility of drawing a conclusion for him.

> In an extraordinary degree he has emancipated himself from every restraint as an author, from every requirement of order, from every regard for a reader. (134)

Given Adler's neglect, it is not to be wondered at if his audience concludes that he is confused.

The premise-author can be understood on analogy with another phenomenon bearing a family resemblence, namely, the

parenthetical.[5] The mark of the parenthetical, a favourite target for Kierkegaard's polemic, is distraction. Such a person begins to speak about one thing, and in process is distracted by something else and begins to speak in a parenthesis. Perhaps within this parenthesis he will again be called away by something else and begin another parenthesis, and so on. The irony is that he does not return to what he originally began to speak about, does not return to his beginning. It is as if an author were to begin by announcing that he was going to make three points, and having discussed two, becomes so carried away with the second that he forgets to go on to the third. Provided the reader has a good memory, he cannot help but be stricken with the absence of a conclusion, or what is the same thing, cannot help but conclude that the author is confused. Thus does Adler, as a premise-author, leave his reader with the unfulfilled anticipation of a conclusion or return to the beginning, lost as he is in a maze of parentheses.

Essential Authors

> Well now, the good man who speaks for the best surely will not say what he says at random but with some purpose in view, just as all other craftsmen do not each choose and apply materials to their work at random, but with the view that each of their productions should have a certain form. (Gorgias, 503a)[6]

It requires little reflection to see that the concept of a beginning undergoes an important alteration depending upon whether or not a beginning is thought of as preceded by reflection or not. Two authors can begin in exactly the

same way, can say exactly the same things, but if there is reason to suspect that one has first reflected upon what is said prior to saying it, and the other has not, then it is quite possible that even though the two say the same thing, they are really saying something different. This point is simply demonstrated with reference to an ironical remark. One and the same remark can be thought of as either being ironical or literal depending upon whether or not it was preceded by a reflection which would qualify its sense.

The difference between premise-authors and essential authors can be understood in terms of the opposition between immediacy and reflection. The premise-author begins prior to reflection while the essential author begins after reflection. The premise-author begins immediately, like someone who says the first thing that comes to mind, without stopping to gather himself and reflect upon it. Adler has a "revelation", and rather than stopping to reflect upon his extraordinary situation, he directly sets out to communicate it.Due to his impatience and over-hastiness he neglected to reflect upon certain essential things, and this neglect is reflected in the texts he produced.

The essential author, on the other hand, begins by first stopping to reflect upon his situation as an author. If he has had a "revelation", he does not hurry to communicate immediately, but summons reflection to assist him toward a definite and resolute understanding.

> Now though a revelation is a paradoxical immediacy, yet if it should happen to anyone in our age, it must also be recognizable in him by the serviceable reflection with which he accepts it. His reflection must not overwhelm the extraordinary man, but he must have reflection to introduce it into the age.(Authority and Revelation, 47)

The expression "paradoxical immediacy" is no doubt carefully chosen in this context and serves to guard the distinction between revelation as qualified by reflection, as carefully considered and thought about, and revelation as an immediate given for consciousness. The latter becomes either fanaticism or naivete, and there is no scarcity of "prophets" in a lunatic asylum.

The interposal of reflection as a mediating factor between immediacy as such and "paradoxical immediacy" is experienced as being arresting. The essential author interrupts his authorship with an imposed silence so as properly to begin.

> At the same moment reflection will also teach him silence, the silence in which he dedicates himself, as a mother consecrates herself to exist only for the sake of the child, the silence which prevents any communication with any other, in order not to communicate anything wrong or in a wrong way. (49-50)

Here "silence" should be understood as being a metaphor for the interruption of immediacy, an arresting of the spontaneous flow of texts from an author. It is the negative moment of a dialectic in which one who has already begun, but prematurely, is arrested in his movement so as to begin again, having carefully surveyed his situation with reflection. Thus we have two beginnings, with reflection as the mediating factor

by which a transition is facilitated from one to the other. This will be taken up in greater detail where Kierkegaard's definition offaith as being immediacy after reflection is made thematic.

Since the premise-author has been characterized as one who fails to reflect upon certain essential things before beginning his authorship, it may be asked what exactly it is that he fails to take into consideration. He neglects several things, but two are especially significant; he fails to reflect sufficiently upon what he seeks to communicate and to whom. Each of these failures has its own sign. Insufficient reflection upon what one seeks to communicate exhibits itself as the absence of a resolute understanding. Insufficient reflection upon the audience to whom one's communication is addressed exhibits itself as a lack of familiarity with the presuppositions one's audience has regarding what one seeks to communicate. On each of these points the essential author will be contrasted with the premise-author. It will be shown that his reflection upon the things the premise-author neglects leads him to reflect upon a third important thing. It leads him to reflect upon the form best suited to express his communication given his carefully worked out appraisal of the rhetorical situation.

When the authorities asked Adler for clarification of what he was trying to communicate, for an account of what he intended by the word "revelation", they unmaliciously

placed Adler in a comical position; Adler did not himself know what he was trying to communicate. At least, this appears to be the case given that Adler's "what" shifts from one statement of his position to the next and changes meaning. It is, after all, in language that we give order to our experience. This order, fragile as it is, is possible only if we recognize and respect boundaries for the words we use. These boundaries are, in many cases, elusive and difficult to define, but they nonetheless serve to preserve distinctions. Since there appears to be no boundary defining what Adler understands by the word "revelation", or what is the same thing, since the boundary keeps shifting, we are led to conclude that Adler does not mean anything definite by it.

Despite Adler's lack of terminological firmness, there is in a certain sense a "what" to his communication. Even though he uses words loosely and collapses distinctions, this is still something more than chaos. To understand how this is possible it is useful to distinguish between the "what" of communication as it is fixed prior to and subsequent to reflection.

It is quite common for us to use words without ever having asked ourselves "what" the words mean, or even "what" we understand the words to mean. Indeed, this is virtually a necessity, since if we were continually reflecting upon the meaning of the words we were using, very likely nothing would get said. We would not begin at all. Most of the time

we simply take the meaning of the words we use for granted. In virtue of the fact that we are brought up in a language, we immediately attach by association a "what" to a given word that is in circulation. Prior to reflection there is a "what", but it has never been thematized as an object for consciousness. Since this "what" is unreflected, it cannot be said to be known, insofar as knowing would presuppose a prior thematization. Thus it can be meaningfully said of someone who uses words prior to having reflected upon them that he does not know "what" he means.

Reflection brings the "what" of communication into question, makes it thematic. Indeed, there is a pedagogical relationship between questioning and reflecting:questions induce reflection. Certainly the questions the authorities directed to Adler were intended to bring him to reflect upon what he meant by the word "revelation". The point of Socrates' relentless questioning of the people of Athens was no doubt to prompt them to reflect upon things they had previously taken for granted or assumed an immediate understanding of.

When one reflects upon a word, various possibilities suggest themselves as to what the word could possibly mean. Consider the typical structure of a Platonic dialogue in relation to this matter. Typically the dialogue begins with a given word being taken as thematic. Various possibilities are suggested as to "what" the meaning of the word is, each

then being subjected to careful scrutiny. Normally the possibilities that are suggested emerge from the common sense of the intended audience. This manner of proceeding is paralleled in Aristotle's dialectic as well. In the Nicomachean Ethics, for example, he begins by making the word "happiness" thematic, and moves through various possibilities as to "what" the word means, these possibilities suggesting themselves from the common sense of the day.[7] Prior to reflecting upon the various possibilities for understanding what a given word means one immediately associates the word with one of these possibilities unconsciously. To begin immediately, as the premise-author does, is tantamount to associating uncritically the "what" of the word with whatever possibility one happens to have been conditioned to associate with it. One who begins prior to reflection begins prior to having made his way through the range of possibilities available to him.

The point of reflection, however, with respect to the understanding of a word, is to delimit the relevant possibilities so that a decision can be made. Given that the revelant possibilities have been passed over and considered, there remains the problem of deciding which one is to be accepted. Reflection crystallizes the various possibilities but the conclusion, the choice of one possibility over another, has to come from elsewhere. Kierkegaard is adamant in his insistence that all conclusions

are objectively uncertain. The cognitive factor in arriving at a conclusion as to what one will understand a given word to mean is certainly important, but Kierkegaard is more concerned to emphasize the role of will or decision. He rejects the appeal to special insight into essences, as if by reflection alone one could hit upon the essential "what" of a word, thereby eliminating the need for a decision to be made.

When Kierkegaard contrasts the premise-author with the essential author, it is not in terms of an opposition between opinion and knowledge, but between irresoluteness and resoluteness. It is not that the premise-author does not "know" what the word means and the essential author does. Contrasting the two, Kierkegaard writes, "The essential author on the other hand knows definitely what he is, what he wills"(Authority and Revelation, 8). There is a significant difference between knowing simply and knowing what one wills, between the claim to know what a word means and the claim to know what one means by a word. To know what one understands and intends by a word does not in any way imply infallibility. Nevertheless, in spite of falling short of infallibility, the essential author has an important advantage over the premise-author: he at least wills something definite. He fixes the meaning of a word by a decision as to how he will employ it. It is his resoluteness and firmness of standpoint that sustains his continuity and consistency; that justifies assurance that when he uses the same word on Friday

that he used on Tuesday, the two usages are related in terms of a common meaning.

The paradigm of understanding a word has been used in order to provide the discussion with a clear focal point. We have seen that reflection mediates between an uncritical and inconstant understanding of what a word means and a firm and resolute understanding of what a word means. Similar structures appear if the discussion is placed in a broader context making "point of view" thematic. Just as we often use words without having reflected upon them, so too we often express points of view without having stopped to reflect upon the matter upon which judgement is being pronounced. To be sure, an immediately assumed point of view is likely to have been mindlessly assimilated from external sources, as children first imitate their parent's opinions, but it still can be referred to as a point of view. However because it has never been subjected to careful examination, it is likely to be inconsistent and confused, depending on the reliability of one's source. The premise-author, who can be said to have a point of view only in this weak sense, is distinguishable from the essential author in the following sense; unlike the essential author he has never reflected upon his point of view and arrived at a conclusion. In view of this it might be said that the premise-author does not have a point of view at all, if this expression is understood in its fullest sense.

As has been said, reflection entails a process in which possibilities are surveyed and examined enabling one to decide upon a point of view. Conversely, whatever is produced from within a point of view is reflected and deliberately said with a definite purpose. It has meaning with respect to a larger whole and does not stand alone and unrelated.

> Premise-authors are the opposite of the essential authors, for the latter 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 that sic he can explain; his A is always greater than his B; he never makes a move on an 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. (7)

For the essential author, the conclusion, the point of view, is present from the beginning and mediates each movement in the text. It accounts for the continuity and relatedness of the individaul sections of the text, just as the whole organizes the parts. In the absence of the whole, the parts remain nothing but parts, unconnected and unrelated: an abandoned set of premises in need of a conclusion.

The presence of a point of view from the first and sustained throughout renders the individual parts of a text essential. If one were to trace the steps of a drunken man, one might judge that much of his movement was inessential or accidental. This judgement could be made only from the standpoint of an assumed end or purpose. Without a purpose or destination from the beginning and sustained throughout,

whether he turned slightly left or slightly right would be accidental. If, however, he had set out from the beginning with a definite purpose, one could go back over the preceding steps and judge them to be essential or accidental in relation to that end. A point of view serves to organize a text in much the same way. Each individual part is intelligible and essential in terms of a purpose toward which it points. From the standpoint of single-mindedness of direction, nothing is pointless.

The text of an essential author is carefully designed and words are carefully and deliberately used. Reflection eliminates the accidental and renders everything essential. Kierkegaard's aesthetic works resemble poetry in this respect, and he credits the Pseudonyms "for the fact that they have cultivated lyrical prose" (161). The reference pertains to the richness and abundance of meaning present in a text that has been thoroughly worked over with reflection. In this regard one might think of Aristotle's remark in the Poetics that poetry has more truth than history.[8] Much of what occurs in history, at least apparently, is accidental and inessential whereas poetry is composed. Essentially nothing can be substracted or altered without fundamentally changing the whole. In this connection consider Kierkegaard's charge that Adler's texts, and by implication the texts of premise-authors in general, are marked by fortuitous length (Authority and Revelation, 98).

We have seen that what the essential author has to communicate is thoroughly conditioned by reflection. It follows that understanding such a text would require the reciprocal employment of reflection. Such a text could never surrender its meaning directly; it would always mean more than it appeared to mean. Indeed, the greatest danger for an essential author would be that his text would be reduced to his reader's first impression, without the reader having passed through the detour of reflection. Thus it would not be surprising if an essential author were to take precautions in order to guard the "what" of his communication from being immediately assimilated. Rather than state his "what" at the beginning, he might deliberately conceal it and begin instead with the attempt to solicit the requisite reflection. Rather than trying to win people to his point of view directly, he might try to get his reader to reflect critically upon his own point of view. Such dialectical cunning might be occasioned by the consideration that how something is understood is at least as important as what is understood. This is why it would be important for an essential author, in composing his text, to take into consideration his intended audience's situation.

As well as failing to reflect upon what he desires to communicate, the premise-author fails to reflect upon the presuppositions of his intended audience. This omission is equally fatal. Had Adler paused to reflect upon his

his intended audience and vicariously placed himself in his reader's position, he would have been able to anticipate the response he received. If he had reflected upon his texts from the standpoint of the third person, he would have been in a position to recognize that they appeared to be confused and inconclusive. No doubt his authorship would have preceded much differently had he undertaken such reflection.

A child will sometimes use words simply according to the impulses of his imagination and without reference to their assumed public meanings. Like Humpty Dumpty naming the world after his own fancy, the child takes the words to mean whatever he wishes them to mean. This may be an amusing way to pass time, but it can never suffice if one wishes to communicate. Communication requires that one attend to and respect the texture of words, the resistance they offer to an unbridled imagination. For this reason, the communication of an essential author is mediated by a reflection directed toward ascertaining what his anticipated audience understands by the words he intends to use and the subject matter he intends to discuss.

Employing reflection to ascertain the presuppositions of his intended audience, the essential author would tailor his communication accordingly. Two possibilities are especially interesting. On the one hand it may be that one's intended audience has no initial understanding of what one seeks to communicate. The subject matter and words bearing it could be unfamiliar and new to the audience. One might think

of the apostles speaking to pagans as an instance of this possibility. Because there would be no original "what" immediately assumed by the audience, in this instance it would be appropriate to communicate in a direct and straightforward way.[9]

On the other hand, it may be that one's intended audience has an initial understanding, but this understanding is significantly different than one's own. The audience might understand a word one intended to be understood one way in a totally different way. At the farthest extreme, the audience could be in a misunderstanding with respect to the matter at hand. In this event, to speak directly would only further the confusion because the audience would translate the communication into their misunderstanding. Given this context it would be necessary first to remove the misunderstanding.

The purpose of a preface is to prepare the reader for reading the text to follow. Authority and Revelation has the distinction of having several prefaces owing to the fact that Kierkegaard considered publishing it under several different sets of circumstances. If one applies what has been said in general about an essential author's regard for his audience's presuppositions to Authority and Revelation, the text appears in an interesting light. In the first preface, as author of The Book On Adler, Kierkegaard advises his reader that the text can be read essentially only if he

> undertakes the labor of reading and then perceives in what sense A. is the subject of this book, and in what sense he is used to throw light upon the age and to defend dogmatic concepts, in what sense there is just as much attention paid to the age as to Adler. (li)

In the second preface, as editor of The Confusion Of The Present Age, he promises his reader that if he reads the text carefully, "from it he will get a clarity about certain dogmatic concepts and an ability to use them which otherwise is not easily to be had" (li). This would suggest that from the very beginning he had decided upon a definite "what" he desired to communicate. Given this beginning, one might expect to find oneself immediately facing a barrage of definitions. Instead, one is introduced to a peculiar character named Magister Adler, who is described as being entangled in confusion and misunderstanding. We are told, or perhaps warned, that Adler is dramatically cast to portray "the present age". One impatient to get on with the serious and weighty matter spoken of in the beginning may be aggravated by this apparent distraction or parenthesis. Such a person might be tempted to skip this gossip about this minor character and begin immediately with the "important" things.

Kierkegaard was fond of the Biblical text recounting the story of David and the prophet Nathan. As the story goes, Nathan tells David of a man who implicated himself in a serious guilt.[10] David can hardly suffer to listen, indignant as he is at such an injustice and impatient to discover and punish the offender. He is stopped in his immediate onslaught

forward toward a bloody conclusion, however,and brought to a dreadful silence with Nathan's paralysing words, "Thou, O King, art the man."

A story such as this might prove useful for quieting the impatience of such a man as described above. For others a less dramatic explanation of Kierkegaard's manner of proceeding can be found in the text itself. He tells us "If it is factual that the language of Christian concepts has become in a volatilized sense the conversational language of the whole of Europe, it followsquite simply that the holiest and most decisive definitions are used again and again without being united with the decisive thoughts"(166). Given that Kierkegaard would have had good reason to suppose that this would as well be the initial situation of his audience with respect to the "dogmatic concepts" he wished to defend, it would be quite appropriate for him to temporarily suspend such definition or redefinition and begin instead with an anatomy of the prevailing misunderstanding. The dialectic of communication would justify his holding back his intended "what" in order first to remove a misunderstanding. In the postscript to Authority and Revelation, he confides to his reader

> all true communication of truth must always begin with an untruth....In part, this first untruth is merely reduplication, that the true communication of truth is cautious and aware of the fact that it might indeed be possible that the recipient of the communication was in the untruth, in which case the direct communication of the truth would be untruth. This is "reflection," the critical moment in the communication of truth. Thus the

> ignorance of Socrates was in fact untruth; but it was only for the sake of truth, i.e. it is precisely reduplication's expression for the fact that he truly would communicate truth, that he was profoundly aware that those who were to receive the communication were possibly in the untruth of delusions of all sorts, so that it would not do to communicate truth quite directly, expectorating it cheerfully or declaiming it or lecturing it. (192-193)

Reflection, identified here as the "critical moment in the communication of truth", thwarts an immediate and uncritical beginning. It necessitates a certain indirection, interrupting a hasty advance toward a a conclusion for the sake of certain essential things which would otherwise be neglected.

Having distinguished between two kinds of beginnings, immediate and reflective, and along parallel lines two kinds of authors, premise-authors and essential authors, the way is prepared to move forward to a more detailed discussion of the relationship between an author and his audience. The task now is to focus upon the very interesting rhetorical situation that develops when an author judges his audience to be in a misunderstanding with respect to the subject matter to be imparted. This is the relationship Kierkegaard assumes to exist initially between himself and his audience. Already a clue has been given to this relationship in his discussion of Adler. In the next chapter Adler will be considered as indirectly mirroring the confusion of the present age and will thus provide us with a revelation of Kierkegaard's intended audience. We will then be in a better position to understand why his authorship assumes the form it does.

II

THE CONFUSION OF THE PRESENT AGE AND ITS CORRECTIVE

> And so it is that you, by reason of your tender regard for the writing that is your offspring, have declared the very opposite of its true effect. If men learn this, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks. What you have discovered is a recipe not for memory, but for reminder. And it is no true wisdom that you offer your disciples, but only its semblance, for by telling them of many things without teaching them you will make them seem to know much, while for the most part they know nothing, and as men filled, not with wisdom, but with the conceit of wisdom, they will be a burden to their fellows. (Phaedrus, 275a)[1]

Kierkegaard concludes Authority and Revelation with a dreadful prophecy pertaining to a trend he was sensitive to and feared to be on the increase in the present age. He writes, "Everything will turn upon getting the multitude pollinated, and after that getting them to vote on his side, with noise, with torches and with weapons, indifferent, absolutely indifferent, as to whether they understand anything or no (195).[2] This apprehension has to do with communication, or rather with a kind of semblance deceptive enough to be confused with communication, and with understanding, or rather with a kind of semblance deceptive enough to be confused with understanding. Against this imposter, Kierkegaard is concerned to rescue the integrity of communication and understanding. He is not indifferent to the question of how his communication will be received

and is painfully aware of the qualitative difference between winning a vote and getting someone to understand something.

If it is a difficult thing to help someone to understand something, it is doubly difficult when the person in need of understanding is confused about the matter at hand and believes that he already understands. A confusion exists when two things which are really different and hence distinguishable are taken to be the same thing, or when one thing is mistaken for another. Conversely, correcting a confusion involves separating and distinguishing the two things which are confused. For this one must have a very good understanding of each thing. In this chapter the particular confusion Kierkegaard perceives to be an impediment to the successful communication of his subject matter will be analysed.

A cartographer can coordinate the mapping of a given territory only from a fixed point of reference outside of the territory to be mapped. The reference point enables the cartographer to apprehend the territory as a totality. A confusion is the sort of phenomenon that can be adequately mapped only if the understanding necessary for its removal is present as the point of view for its description. For this reason the discussion of the confusion Kierkegaard is concerned about will proceed dialectically, the terms of the confusion being brought to light in opposition to each other.

To speak about "the confusion" in the singular

number requires justification given that Kierkegaard treats of a number of "confusions". In different contexts he makes thematic the confusion of faith with knowledge, apostleship with genius, revelation with immediacy, grace with luck, and so on. Only if these sundry confusions have a common root or source is reference to "the confusion" justified. From first to last there is essentially only one confusion that Kierkegaard set out to correct: the confusion of Christendom with Christianity. The others he refers to are but manifestations of this one.

A preliminary overview of this confusion is possible with reference to Kierkegaard's well known division between spheres of existence. According to this schematization, there are three definite and distinguishable ways of comporting oneself in the world. These orientations he terms the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious, and each has its own membership criteria. These spheres are related dialectically, as progressive stages, each later stage being an advance upon an earlier stage. Thus a religious individual becomes such only in virtue of his having passed through the earlier stages. Indeed, this passage is a membership criterion for existence within the religious sphere. While every individual begins primitively in the aesthetic, and immediately is what the joint forces of nature and culture have created him to be, existence in a later sphere involves an element of becoming, such that one does not unreflectively receive oneself but becomes who one is in and through and act of will. In terms of this paradigm, the confusion

Kierkegaard is concerned about can be characterized as a confusion between aesthetic and religious existence such that the element of becoming is neglected and religiousness is confounded with aesthetic existence.

Given that the religious has been collapsed into the aesthetic, and that this collapse is the confusion at hand, the correction of this confusion will consist in separating them. This is the task of this chapter. Owing to the complexity of the confusion and the difficulty of the task, this chapter is broken down into three separate but interrelated parts. In the first part, this confusion is discussed with respect to the difference between aesthetic and religious Christianity. They are distinguished according to how one becomes one or the other. Particular attention is devoted to a consideration of ethics as being the mediating factor marking the transition from the first to the second. In the second part two kinds of understanding are distinguished, namely, the kinds of understanding proper to aesthetic and religious Christianity. The concept of faith is used as an example for the purpose of exhibiting the difference between the two. In the third part it is shown that Kierkegaard's texts fall into the hands of two different kinds of audiences. These two are distinguished along lines parallel to the two kinds of understanding referred to above.

1. Two Kinds of Christians

> When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. (1 Corinthians 13:11)[3]

A confusion is susceptible to a mocking irony insofar as it lends itself to being revealed in two very different ways. It can be revealed through one who is unwittingly within the confusion, as people often reveal their ignorance about something precisely in talking about it. It can also be revealed by one who has the requisite understanding to see through it and expose it.

If not for Authority and Revelation Adler would likely have been totally forgotten by history. Certainly Kierkegaard has no illusions about the intrinsic merit of Adler's works. Yet he devoted three years to reading him and to writing and twice rewriting his "big book on Adler".[4] To what are we to attribute Kierkegaard's intense interest in this insignificant author? The following text from the preface he wrote as editor of The Confusion of the Present Age throws some light on this question:

> It can hardly be supposed that the author has found any special pleasure in reading Magister Adler's many books. Yet he had done that, presumably, because he had assured himself that it might serve his purpose; and likely in the course of his work he became more and more clearly conscious of his purpose, and so of the expediency of his plan. He has used Magister Adler as a foundation or made him a transparent medium for seeing the confusion of our age. Even where the treatise seems to concern itself merely with Adler's writings like a literary review, he has perhaps succeeded in adverting to some little trait which is characteristic of our age, or to a little quirk in the confusion which, even though it is misleading, serves to illuminate the concept more thoroughly. By

> this plan he has made it possible for the whole monograph to gain liveliness by having constantly the appearance of being a clinic, and besides that to gain an ironic duplication for the fact that Magister Adler, who admirably satirizes the whole age, is precisely one who has broken with the whole modern age, so that he satirizes himself without knowing it; and finally to gain the advantage of a contemporary instance. (liii)

Adler is a perfect case study for exhibiting the confusion Kierkegaard is interested in.

From Adler we can hope to learn something about the confusion, yet he cannot teach us. Kierkegaard tells us "the phenomenon itself knows nothing about the explanation, i.e. one must oneself be a teacher to learn anything from Adler" (67). Thus it is important to distinguish between the manner in which Adler reveals the confusion and the manner in which Kierkegaard reveals the confusion by using Adler as an example of the confusion "writ large".

This distinction parallels that between the manner in which the premise-author and the essential author communicate.

> It is one thing to be a physician who knows all about cures and healing, upon which he lectures in his clinic where he recounts the history of a disease— it is one thing to be a physician beside a sickbed, and another thing to be a sick man who leaps out of his bed by becoming an author, communicating bluntly the symptoms of his disease. Perhaps he may be able to express and expound the symptoms of his illness in far more glowing colors than does the physician when he describes them; for the fact that he knows no resource, no salvation, gives him a peculiar passionate elasticity in comparison with the consoling talk of the physician who knows what expedients to use. But in spite of that there remains the decisive qualitative difference between a sick man and a physician. And this difference is precisely the same decisive qualitative difference between being a

premise-author and an essential author. (11) Adler is a symptom of the confusion of the present age, but does not know himself as being such. He does not possess the explanation in terms of which his symptoms, his spasmodic accounts of his revelation, can be understood.

Adler's significance for our time, Kierkegaard writes, "will...consist in the fact that by the catastrophe he indirectly reveals how in geographical Christendom one may in a way become a Christian, and even a Christian priest, without having the least impression of Christianity in the way of...becoming a Christian" (189). A distinction is here implicit between two sorts of Christians, or two ways of becoming a Christian. The confusion is that these two things which are really different have been conflated. Therefore it is necessary, in the interest of clarity, to separate them. This separation begins with a discussion of how one may "in a way" become a Christian. Since this question runs throughout most of Kierkegaard's authorship, the discussion will be extended to include a number of his texts.

Aesthetic Christianity

One who is only "in a way" a Christian is described by Kierkegaard in various contexts as being such "by upbringing", "as a matter of course", "by accident", "aesthetically", "directly", "immediately", "anonymously", and so on. What all of these qualifications have in common and commonly indicate is the absence of decision and

appropriation. Any one would serve as a fecund point of departure from which to elucidate what it is to be a Christian "in a way", but the qualification "by upbringing" is especially illuminating.

Toward the end of Authority and Revelation, Kierkegaard gives a lucid account of what it is to be a Christian by upbringing. Before considering this account, however, a brief preliminary discussion of Plato's Republic may be useful for establishing the centrality and universality of this concern outside of a specifically Christian context. As well, the Republic is particularly helpful insofar as it provides a clear analysis of the process behind upbringing.

One of the major insights expressed in the Republic is that individuals are shaped and formed in a number of ways by the joint forces of nature and culture. Thought of in this way the individual is understood as being the product of the environment in which he is brought up. This is perhaps obvious to us today given our familiarity with the social sciences and with continuing discoveries that features of our social environment previously taken for granted, such as the economy, are powerful formative influences. However it is unlikely that what is obvious to us today would have been pervious to men of Plato's day. The way poetry works as a force shaping common sense, for example, is subtle and not obvious at first glance. At

least it is not obvious to Polemarchus in the first book of the Republic. Having solicited from him his opinion about what justice is, an opinion he had passively received in his upbringing, Socrates proceeds to subject his opinion to careful scrutiny and finally dismisses it by tracing it to sources of which he had been unaware.[5] The most appropriate way to treat an inherited opinion is to trace its genealogy.

As long as men remain unaware of the forces that shape and form them, these forces operate quite haphazardly and arbitrarily. It is possible for those who become aware of these forces to control them so as to steer them toward deliberate ends. If the stories poets tell shape the opinions of those who hear them, then by monitoring and censoring these stories, those in authority can control this influence to instill the opinions that furthered their chosen ends and to phase out the opinions that did not. Plato investigates this possibility in the first few books of the Republic.

Plato speaks about the upbringing of youth on analogy with the breeding of dogs.[6] A good breeder must carefully attend to three things: the original nature of the material to be worked with, the final traits and character to be produced, and the appropriate breeding method to accomodate the transition from the terminus a quo to the terminus ad quem. In the following passage Socrates gives us an insight into the nature of the material being worked with.

> Do you not know, then, that the beginning in every task is the chief thing, especially for any creature that is young and tender? For it is then that it is best

> molded and takes the impression that one wishes to stamp upon it. (377b)

With respect to the final product, at least insofar as the breeding of guardians is concerned, what is aimed at is "a disposition that is at once gentle and great-spirited"(375c). With respect to the method of breeding, there are numerous determinants, but for the most part the breeding would proceed according to imitation and habituation. The operative principle assumed is that by imitating the models set up for them, the young will become like the models.

> But if they imitate they should from childhood up imitate what is appropriate to them—men, that is, who are brave, sober, pious, free, and all things of that kind—but things unbecoming the free man they should neither do nor be clever at imitating, nor yet any other shameful thing, lest from the imitation they imbibe the reality. Or have you not observed that imitations, if continued from youth far into life, settle down into habits and second nature in the body, the speech, and the thought? (395c)

Plato assigns poetry such importance as he does because he recognizes that poetic characters become models which the young imitate. His views on censorship should be understood in relation to his method of breeding, as suggested in the following passage:

> We must begin, then, it seems, by a censorship over our story-makers, and what they do well we must pass and what not, reject. And the stories on the accepted list we will induce nurses and mothers to tell to the children and so shape their souls by these stories far rather than their bodies by their hands. But most of the stories they now tell we must reject. (377c)

This shaping, however deliberate, is what is being called upbringing in this thesis.

The Republic was chosen to introduce and illustrate

the notion of upbringing because through its method of hyperbole it exhibits this notion "writ large" as it were. By deliberately exaggerating the formative process that goes on unconsciously in any society, it makes possible increased consciousness of the dynamics involved in this process. If the object to be studied is too close and familiar to the perceiver it escapes his attention and it is therefore necessary for it to be placed at a distance so that it may be properly recognized.

Anyone who is a Christian merely by upbringing is merely a product of the conditioning or breeding he has passively received from his social environment. The qualification "merely" is important because to be what one is as a result of one's upbringing is not at all blameworthy. After all, everyone is brought up to be something or other. It could not be otherwise. Therefore in interpreting Kierkegaard's remarks on upbringing we should be careful not to ascribe to him the undialectical view that upbringing per se is an evil. Anti-Climacus, the author of The Sickness Unto Death, gives a harsh criticism of this view.[7] He identifies it as being defiance: that form of despair which follows upon an individual's proud and rebellious refusal to accept his self as having been created, as having been constituted for him. It is safe to assume that Kierkegaard, being intimately familiar with this text, shares this criticism. For Kierkegaard the task is to appropriate one's past, not to erase it.

Johannes Climacus, in the Unconcluding Scientific Postscript, states the issue with respect to upbringing clearly. He writes "that the only unpardonable offense against the majesty of Christianity is for the individual to take his relationship to it for granted, treating it as a matter of course."[8] Upbringing represents what is accidental in the constitution of individuals. One who is brought up in a Hindu environment becomes a Hindu, one who is brought up in a communist environment becomes a communist, and so on. Since the environment shapes the individual, and the individual has no choice as to the environment in which he will be brought up in, the basis of an individual's constitution is disturbingly arbitrary. If the individual were merely the product of his upbringing—nothing more than the point of intersection between joint determining forces—he would be what he was only accidentally. Kierkegaard's diagnosis of his own contemporary situation is that those who call themselves Christians "all became Christians as by accident."[9]

Thought of in relation to upbringing, Christianity is simply one programme among others, and is acquired in the same way that one acquires one's nationality. In the Postscript, Climacus writes:

> The child's receptivity is so completely without decision that it is said proverbially, "One can make a child believe anything." The elders of course bear responsibility for what they venture to make the child believe, but the fact is perfectly certain. (532)

The adjective "Christian" is commonly used to describe someone who has been brought up to hold a certain set of beliefs, regardless of how he has appropriated them. What the child is brought up to believe is entirely relative to the environment in which he is brought up.

Climacus questions the propriety of this use of the adjective "Christian". He writes, "The Christianity which is taught to a child, or rather which the child pieces together for itself when no violence is used to force the little exister into the most decisive Christian determinants, is not properly Christianity but idyllic mythology (523). These two things, Christianity and idyllic mythology, are really quite different but have become confused. This confusion is exhibited in the ordinary use (or misuse) of the adjective "Christian". In Authority and Revelation Kierkegaard writes, "The determinant "Christian" is precisely that of which it must be said in the most absolute terms, one is not born to this determinant—exactly the contrary, it is precisely what one must become" (182). It is necessary to add that one cannot be "brought up" into this determinant either.

In the Postscript, Climacus tells us that "Becoming a Christian involves a decision which belongs to a much later age" (532). Indeed it is the absence of decision and personal appropriation that characterizes one who is a Christian merely by upbringing. Considered in this regard,

a Christian upbringing can even be a disadvantage, insofar as someone might be led to confuse this with becoming a Christian properly understood. In Authority and Revelation Kierkegaard writes:

> But let him grow up from childhood with the view of his environment of what it is to be a Christian of sorts as a matter of course, and with that one has done everything a man can possibly do to deceive him with regard to the absolutely qualitative decision in human life. He then is a Christian in about the same sense that he is a man, and as little as it could occur to him in later life to reflect seriously whether after all he really is a man, just so little will it ordinarily occur to him to make an accounting of himself as to whether after all he is now really a Christian. (180)

The danger is that he will accept it as a matter of course that he is a Christian in the first place, and therefore will be farther away on the road to becoming a Christian.

Briefly stated, there is no direct transition into Christianity proper, no bypass around the decision of the individual. In order to accentuate the decisive factor involved in becoming a Christian, Kierkegaard asks us to imagine a person who has received the best conceivable upbringing into Christianity.

> And now that such a child, because he had had a serious Christian upbringing, must be a Christian, would again be an illusion; and next to the notion of being a Christian because one is born of Christian parents, comes the erroneous inference: his parents were pious Christians, ergo he is a Christian. No, the unforgettable and profound impression due to upbringing is only a presupposition.
>
> Then this child too goes out into the world. Undeniably he has presuppositions with respect to becoming a Christian; humanly speaking, everything has been done for him that was humanly possible. But there is not yet a decision; for even though his "Yes" on the day of confirmation was the result of upbringing, it still is not the decisive act.(Authority and Revelation,186-7)

Note that Kierkegaard does not reject upbringing as such. He is simply concerned to make it clear that upbringing alone is not sufficient for membership into Christianity. Christianity has very strict and definite membership criteria.

Since membership into Christianity requires a decision on the part of the individual seeking admittance, there is a limit to what someone else can do by way of helping another to prepare. While someone else may help another to see the possibilities clearly and to understand what is involved, the choice must finally be left to the individual and it must be made clear that there is a choice. In the Postscript Climacus warns:

> no direct or immediate transition to Christianity exists. All who in this manner propose to give the individual a rhetorical push into Christianity, or perhaps even to help him by administering a beating, all these are deceivers—nay, they know not what they do. (47)

The "rhetorical push" of a Christian upbringing is not enough, and, in one way, is more of a hindrance than a help. The significance of the term "rhetorical" in this context will be discussed later when the rhetorical approach will be contrasted with Kierkegaard's own art of indirect communication as ways of winning converts.[10] The need for such an art arises out of the confusion of the present age, as suggested in the following passage from Authority and Revelation.

> In every Christian land where Christianity has so permeated all relationships that everyone as a matter of course (i.e. without the decision of inwardness) is in a way a Christian, it is important first and last to

> pose the problem...of becoming a Christian, and that the problem be not confused by theological debates. (188)

This reference to "becoming" is significant because, as will be shown in the next section, becoming is an ethical category and signals a shift away from aesthetics.

Religious Christianity

Earlier it was suggested that ethics marks the transition from asesthetic Christianity to religious Christianity. Having come to the point where the significance of terms such as "decision" and "becoming" is coming to light, terms which are proper to the domain of ethics, the time is ripe to resume this earlier discussion. In this section the dialectical relation between aesthetics and ethics will be examined insofar as it bears upon the membership requirements for religious Christianity.

Judge William, the ethicist of Either/Or, succinctly delineates the spheres of aesthetics and ethics with the distinction that "the aesthetical in a man is that by which he immediately is what he is; the ethical is that whereby he becomes what he becomes."[11] What has been spoken of in the previous section as "upbringing" is virtually equivalent to what Judge William terms "the aesthetical in a man". The opposition between the aesthetic and the ethical should be clear if their conflicting presuppositions are juxtaposed: the aesthetic presupposes that the individual simply is what he has been brought up to be whereas the ethical presupposes that the individual is something more than he has been

brought up to be and has the capacity to transcend the limitations of his upbringing. Aesthetics has a case against ethics as represented by the aesthete of Either/Or who argues for the subjection of the individual to his nature and upbringing. Nonetheless, a judge is unlikely to be persuaded by a law-breaker who pleads that his lawlessness is to be dismissed as being simply the result of his upbringing. Ethics has a case against aesthetics too.

The opposition between aesthetics and ethics can be understood as well with reference to two opposing senses of the term "revelation". When the premise-author and the essential author were opposed, it was shown that the former reveals himself symptomatically and unconsciously, whereas the latter reveals himself deliberately and willfully. It will be useful to reiterate this distinction in this new context.

It is a well-known commonplace that children reveal their parents. Not only through physical characteristics, but through "inherited" opinions and dispositions a child reveals his upbringing. There is an important sense in which Cephalus speaks through Polemarchus in Plato's Republic unbeknownst to Polemarchus. This is a common theme in drama and literature as in Ibsen's Ghosts or Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel where the protagonist is presented as the transparent medium through which ancestral voices and influences reveal themselves. As in both of these works, this situation is often portrayed as the struggle of the

protagonist to come to terms with the "ghosts" that pull him back to his upbringing.

The premise-author unconsciously reveals the upbringing he has been subjected to. Adler reveals the confusion of the present age, yet does not understand what he reveals. It is doubtful that an author who reveals in this way, without deliberately having intended what he reveals, is properly described as the author of the text he produces. Likewise it is doubtful as to whether or not someone who simply parrots the opinions he has "inherited" from his upbringing can be properly described as the author of those opinions. In Authority and Revelation Kierkegaard writes of Adler that "His existence explains nothing, as though another might be directing his life and guiding him by a foreign will; and there is no aesthetic or religious concept he has developed in such a way that it has gained new clarity or is thought out with true originality" (124). It could be argued that the "foreign will", the influence from his upbringing which is the original source of his texts, is, properly speaking, the author of them.

The problem of ascribing authorship is implicit in Kierkegaard's many remarks on anonymity. In Two Ages he expresses his concern with anonymity:

> Anonymity in ourage has a far more pregnant significance than is perhaps realized;it has an almost epigrammatic significance. Not only do people write anonymously, but they write anonymously over their signature, yes, even speak anonymously. Just as an author puts his whole soul into his style, so a man

> essentially puts his whole personality into his communication, yet this must be understood with the limiting exception pointed out by Claudius in saying that if one conjures a book, the spirit appears—unless there is no spirit there. Nowadays it is possible actually to speak with people, and what they say is admittedly very sensible, and yet the conversation leaves the impression that one has been speaking with an anonymity.[12]

If one is to distinguish anonymity from authorship, then there must be some requirement for authorship in addition to the mere production of texts. Kierkegaard continues:

> And eventually human speech will become just like the public: pure abstraction—there will no longer be someone who speaks, but an objective reflection will gradually deposit a kind of atmosphere, an abstract noise that will render human speech superfluous, just as machines make workers superfluous. In Germany there are even handbooks for lovers; so it probably will end with lovers being able to sit and speak anonymously to each other. There are handbooks on everything, and generally speaking education soon will consist of knowing letter-perfect a larger or smaller compendium of observations from such handbooks, and one will excel in proportion to his skill in pulling out the particular one, just as the typesetter picks out letters. (104)

One might well wonder if lovers spiritlessly parrotting a script from some handbook were really revealing their love, or merely revealing anonymously the handbook they had been brought up on.

There is a well-known passage in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason where he says that "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."[13] This is useful for understanding Kierkegaard's critique of anonymity. Anonymity is "empty" in that, while possessing concepts, it lacks intuitions of that to which the concepts refer. It lacks the primitive. In Two Ages Kierkegaard writes, "Certain

phrases and observations circulate among the people, partly true and sensible, yet devoid of vitality, but there is no hero, no lover, no thinker, no knight of faith, no great humanitarian, no person in despair to vouch for their validity by having primitively experienced them"(75-6). Kierkegaard believes that this is the situation with the language of Christianity, which is widely used, yet without a sense for its primitive referent in experience.

Kierkegaard's category of anonymity is closely related to his category of the crowd or the public. Like these, it indicates the absence of a "primitive experience" and is an aesthetic category under which the individual is judged as being simply the product of his upbringing. One who is merely an anonymous member of the crowd is one who has never experienced his own potency for making judgements and decisions. He has never realised his capacity for self-determination. For this reason he is spiritlessly subjected to the decisions and judgements of others. Rather than being the author of his own life, he is authored by and determined by the formative influences of his upbringing.

There is a current debate in hermeneutics and literary criticism regarding the significance of an author's intentions for the interpretation of his texts. If aesthetics had the final word on authorship, if the texts of an author were nothing more than the products of unconscious forces in his upbringing working themselves out, then indeed it would be foolishness to talk about an author's intentions in this

regard. In reading Adler, for example, since there is no purpose or intention to his communication, it would be foolishness to advert to one. This is why Kierkegaard feels justified in constructing his own hypothesis for interpreting Adler's texts. It is also granted that in some instances an author may have a purpose in communicating, yet be confused or deceived about it. Whether or not an author's own account of his purpose is reliable is relatively easy to find out. Simply take him at his word and, using his own account as an interpretive hypothesis, try to make sense of his texts. If, on this hypothesis, one runs into contradictions and inconsistencies, then it would be reasonable to drop the hypothesis. In such a situation one's only recourse would be to interpret his texts by tracing them to their origin in his upbringing. To do so before making such a trial, however, is unfair to an author.

It is misleading to think of the relationship between purpose and upbringing as an either/or. More often than not it is distorting to interpret a text solely in terms of its purpose or solely in terms of the upbringing out of which it emerged. Most texts are a product of both factors, some more of one and some more of the other. On the one extreme we have Adler's authorship which is mostly a product of his upbringing. On the other extreme we have Kierkegaard's authorship which is mostly a product of purpose. Neither is simply one or the other.

Different critics line up according to how they weigh

these factors in terms of their significance for interpreting texts. Hans-Georg Gadamer, a leading critic of the view that an author's intentions are especially relevant to the interpretation of his texts, argues from the standpoint of aesthetics for the subordination of purpose to upbringing. His point of view is succinctly expressed in the following passage:

> In fact history does not belong to us, but we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being.[14]

Gadamer subordinates subjectivity, a category which encompasses a number of ethical determinants such as purpose, becoming, and decision, to what he sees as being the more essential factor of upbringing. An author's intentions are swallowed up in the unconscious of his upbringing, in what Gadamer calls effective history.

On the basis of Kierkegaard's remarks on the aesthetic, it is safe to suppose that he would agree with Gadamer on a number of points. He grants that upbringing is a powerful determinant in human existence and that one cannot simply create oneself out of nothing, yet he is more insistent than Gadamer that human beings are capable of something more than submission to their upbringings. His view is closer to that of Vigilius Haufniensis as expressed in the following

passage from The Concept of Dread:

> Christianity has never subscribed to the notion that every particular individual is in an outward sense privileged to begin from scratch. Every individual begins in a historical nexus, and the consequences of natural law are still as valid as ever. The difference now consists only in this, that Christianity teaches us to lift ourselves above that "more," and condemns him who does not do so.[15]

Here the weight is on willing or intending over and against upbringing.

It is granted that an author could never be totally conscious of everything that he reveals in his texts. An author always reveals his upbringing even despite his intentions. While it is granted that an author's texts always mean more than he could ever deliberately will them to mean, ethics demands that he at least will something definite by them. Ethics demands purpose. Between aesthetics and ethics, between upbringing and purpose, there is a dialectic. This dialectic constitutes what Judge William calls man's "dual existence".

> Thus, even the humblest individual has a dual existence. He also has a history and this is not merely a product of his own free actions. The inward work, on the contrary, belongs to him and must belong to him unto all eternity.[16]

The "inward work" is the sphere of subjectivity and involves things such as purpose and decision. The "dual existence" here referred to corresponds to the two kinds of revelation which have been distinguished. While it is granted to aesthetics that an individual will always reveal his upbringing unconsciously, it is granted to ethics that an individual can

at the same time be expected to reveal himself purposefully in at least one way.

Kierkegaard grants that meaning always transcends the intentions of an author, but nevertheless argues for the importance of intention as a control guiding the composition and interpretation of texts. In this regard the understanding of ethics Judge William propounds is basically Kantian in its uncomprimising demand for consideration of intention. This emphasis on intentions is not to be confused with the naive view which equates the meaning of an author's texts with his intentions. The claim is not that an author's text means only what he intends it to mean, but that most significantly it means what he intends it to mean. In the Postscript Climacus writes:

> In so far as the individuals participate in the history of the race through their deeds, the dispassionate spectator does not view these deeds as reflected back into the individual and the ethical, but he views them as connected with the totality. What makes the deed ethically the property of the individual is the purpose. (139)

The point is not that the purpose of the individual is the only way to judge his deeds, but that it is, ethically speaking, the most important way. When considerations of purpose and intention are bypassed, ethics is swallowed up into the anonymous machinery of world history. No one can be said to be responsible for his texts since the purpose, that invisible inward history of a text on the basis of which we ascribe authorship and responsibility, is abrogated.

What Kierkegaard diagnosed as the increasing

anonymity of the individual in the modern world has as its correlate a decline in the credibility of ethics. This means as well that ethical categories such as decision and intention are in danger of losing their significance. Commenting on contemporary trends in politics, Kierkegaard writes:

> Everyone who has a well-developed notion of what it is to act will on closer inspection easily see that in all of Europe almost nothing at all is done that can be called action, that everything that comes to pass resolves itself into a mere occurrence, or that something comes about, something prodigious, but without there being any active personality who knows definitely beforehand what he wills, so that afterwards he can say definitely whether what came about was what he would or no. (Authority and Revelation, 190)

This is also the point of view from which he launches his attack on Adler, who hyperbolically typifies the irresponsibility of authorship in the present age. Parodying him as "the man of movement", he writes:

> but the "man of movement" has nothing eternal, and therefore nothing firm, so as a consequence thereof he has not the courage to become the recognizable individual who wills something and will take risks for it. Essentially he does not act all, in the outcry he makes a feigned sally, his activity culminates in shouting out something. (44)

The problem Kierkegaard identifies here has to do with the absence of a purpose or intention of which Adler's texts could be said to be revelations.

It is useful to ask what it is to have "a well-developed notion of what it is to act". On the basis of what has been said, it is possible to distinguish two very different meanings for the concept of action, this distinction paralleling the distinction earlier drawn between two meanings of the concept of revelation. On the one hand,

there is simple movement that is nothing more than a spiritless knee-jerk in the anonymous machinery of world-history. This spastic movement is only improperly termed action. On the other hand, there is action properly understood as external movement reduplicated in "inward history" with an accompanying intention. Externally, on the basis of what appears, the two are indistinguishable. The differentiating factor, although not apparent in the action, is nonetheless simple and definite: either the person wills something definite by his text or he does not. This criterion for action is suggested by Kierkegaard in Authority and Revelation. For a given movement to count as an action, it must be possible for someone to say, "It is this and this I willed, and now there has come about what I willed, or it has not come about" (190). In an article titled "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary", Paul Ricoeur suggests the same criterion:

> We should say that "to decide" has the meaning of "to designate in outline" what I am to do; and that "to act" is "to realize it in full," fleshing it out in movement, carrying out my project. There is then between action and intention an identity of meaning which permits me to say: that is what I willed, or else: I did not will that.[17]

Action properly understood, and revelation properly understood, requires an act of will which deliberately and unequivocally constitutes meaning.

We have seen then that ethics requires intention or purpose, and have distinguished two senses of action and revelation on the basis of the presence or absence of purpose

or intention as the discriminating factor. Someone may object, however, that this focus on purpose and intention has subjectivist implications. Does not meaning become a private affair if it is tied to the consciousness of the person who is doing the meaning? Does this mean that an author can mean whatever he fancies by his texts? In order to answer these objections it will be necessary to consider an additional requirement for intending that has not yet been stated.

In Shakespeare's play Measure for Measure there is a comical character named Elbow who will serve as an interesting example of the insufficiency of intention alone for successful action. Elbow is comical in that while he intends one thing by his speech, he in fact means something quite different. He refers to two criminals he has apprehended as "notorious benefactors" but it is obvious that he intends "malefactors".[18] He says that he "detests" his wife when he really intends that he "attests" for her. He speaks of a woman who is "cardinally given" but he intends "carnally" given. In these and numerous other examples his private act of intending comes into collision with the public meaning ofthe words he uses. Fortunately his mistakes are fairly obvious and he manages to communicate his meaning because it is not very difficult for his audience to translate.

Elbow negatively illustrates the need for an author

to take into consideration the public meaning of words and actions in his communication. It is not enough for an author to know what he means, he must communicate to others what he means. Texts do not magically mean just whatever an author wants them to mean. Language has a public meaning and this provides texture or resistance to an author's intending. This texture must be respected if an author desires to be understood, i.e. if he desires to have an audience.

The public side of meaning is nicely illustrated with reference to an example from Gilbert Ryle's essay "The Thinking of Thoughts".

> Two boys fairly swiftly contract the eyelids of their right eyes. In the first boy this is only an involuntary twitch; but the other is winking to an accomplice. At the lowest or the thinnest level of description the two contractions of the eyelids may be exactly alike. From a cinematograph-film of the two faces there might be no telling which contraction, if either, was a wink, or which, if either, was a mere twitch.[19]

Given the apparent identity of twitches and winks, how is it possible to distinguish them? Ryle continues:

> Yet there remains the immense but unphotographable difference between a twitch and a wink. For to wink is to try to signal to someone in particular, without the cognisance of others, a definite message according to an already understood code.

What is interesting here is the reference to"an already understood code". It is in terms of this code that contractions of the eyelids get sorted out into twitches and winks. Such a code mediates between an author's intention and his audience's completed understanding of that intention. Some such code is necessary for all communication, and it is also

necessary for both author and audience to be familiar with how the code works.

Thus far revelation has been considered from the side of the subject who reveals meaning either unconsciously or willfully. This manner of speaking about revelation may have appeared strange to my reader, who is perhpas accustomed to hearing revelation spoken of in the sense that we speak of the Bible as a revelation. It remains to be shown how these different ways of speaking about revelation are related.

The charge of subjectivism has been answered since it has been pointed out that an author can deliberately reveal meaning only if there is a mediating code which provides texture to his communication. Where does this code come from and from whence does it derive its authority? Clearly it is not the arbitrary projection of the author's subjectivity. Rather it exists even before he comes on the scene and confronts him as texture and resistance to his subjective intendings. It is a giveness which an author must respect if he is to communicate.

One can think of at least two ways in which something may be given, or two ways in which something given may be received. Something may be given immediately, and received without any appropriation on the side of the subject. This includes what a person inherits and also a person's upbringing to the extent he has not reflected upon it and appropriated it. It is simply given or bestowed in the way that aesthetic Christianity is bestowed upon someone in their upbringing.

The code through which we linguistically mediate our interactions with others is initially given or received in this way. Initially, we do not learn grammar in any self-conscious or deliberate way.

On the other hand, something may be given or received in such a way that there is an appropriation on the side of the subject. What is given may be carefully considered, reflected upon, and decided upon. The upbringing we first immediately receive may later become thematic as a matter of concern. "At the critical time of maturity", Kierkegaard writes in Authority and Revelation,

> there commonly develops an urge to reflect deeply upon one's own life. And again when making the transition and going farther in life one turns back to one's first recollections, to the first unforgettable impressions of one's upbringing and tests how one now stands related to that which one then understood as a child and childishly appropriated, and tests whether one is in accord with oneself, whether and to what extent one understands oneself in understanding one's first impressions. (145)

This process of reflecting upon one's upbringing is something like reflecting upon the grammatical rules that govern our everyday use of language.

The Bible can be given or received in either of these two ways. The language of the Bible is interfused with the language of everyday speech and in virtue of being brought up in an environment where this language is used, we unconsciously receive the grammatical rules governing its its de facto employment. It may be, however, as Kierkegaard suggests in Authority and Revelation, that this grammar is

not strict enough. He faults Adler for lacking "conceptual and terminological firmness and definiteness" (165). Paul Holmer, in his book The Grammar of Faith, continues Kierkegaard's polemic against the immediately given in arguing for a "tougher grammar of faith".[20] Such a grammar would have to be consciously learned and worked for. Indeed this learning might require the unlearning of the first grammar unconsciously received. The Bible is of course the textbook for learning this grammar. It is the revelation, the mediating code regulating meaningful use of religious language. As a revelation it is not immediate, however, in the sense of something given to be received without appropriation. Kierkegaard criticizes Adler, and through him the present age, for reducing the category of revelation to a determination of immediacy, in the sense that it could be properly received without any appropriation on the part of the subject.[21] Aesthetic and religious Christianity resemble each other in that they both subscribe to the same revelation and both use the same language, however the latter, unlike the former, does so thoughtfully with appropriation.

The relationship between aesthetic and religious Christianity should not be thought of as an either/or. It is wrong to oppose them as if it were necessary to choose between them from the standpoint of some third position. The relationship between them is dialectical; they are not mutually exclusive. Indeed there is a choice to be made, but

it is to be made from within aesthetic Christianity. It is not as if, standing on some supposed neutral grounds facing these two possibilities, one must choose either one or the other. Aesthetic Christianity is not chosen at all, it is simply and immediately given. From within aesthetic Christianity religious Christianity properly appears as a choice. Thought of in dynamic terms, the difference between aesthetic and religious Christianity is a distance. Aesthetic Christianity is a necessary point of departure for all those who would travel this distance. Religious Christianity is always in the distance, always a task. No one can ever begin immediately with it. There is work which one must do in order to earn the membership credentials for religious Christianity. At least in part, this is why Kierkegaard is concerned to preserve respect for ethics.

The difference between aesthetic and religious Christianity is perhaps best exhibited with reference to the difference in the kinds of understanding proper to each. Both use the same language, but each understands it in a different way. There is an understanding of religious language given us immediately in our upbringing and there is an understanding that must be sought after and worked for. The kind of understanding proper to religious Christianity has certain requirements and conditions. In part two of this chapter these requirements will be clarified, initially with reference to the concept of faith as example. The point to be

made is that there is no direct or immediate understanding of Christian concepts, or what is the same thing, that a direct or immediate understanding is a misunderstanding. By this point this dialectic should be familiar to the reader. First it was shown that there are two kinds of authors, or rather there is only one kind of author properly speaking, but there is also a widespread phenomenon that is commonly confused with authorship. Then it was shown that there are two kinds of Christians, or rather that there is only one kind of Christian properly speaking, but there is also a widespread phenomenon that is commonly confused with Christianity. Much hangs on the qualification "properly speaking". We will be in a better position to understand this qualification when we have articulated the two kinds of understanding in question. As usual, we will proceed by first describing the misunderstanding in each case, in order to exhibit dialectically the conditions and requirements for the proper kind of understanding.

2. Two Kinds of Understanding

> The light ray of divine revelation is not destroyed by the sensible figures under which it is veiled, as Dionysius says, but it endures in its truth so that it may not allow the minds through which revelation is made to remain in similitudes; instead, it elevates them to the knowing of intelligible things, and through those by whom revelation is accomplished, others are also instructed in these matters. [22] (Aquinas)

If my reader has ever experienced the apprehension of being on the dumb side of a secret, the suspicion of a veil concealing from him something he knows not what, then

perhaps he will agree with the finder of the Diary of the Seducer that "There is really nothing else which involves so much seduction and so great a curse as a secret."[23] For one seduced into the spell of a secret, "twitches" become "winks" and the merely apparent is transformed into a sign pointing to...well that is the secret.

Suppose for a moment that the finder of the diary is not just a case history in paranoia and that there is some truth in his suspicion that "Back of the world in which we live, far in the background, lies another world" (302). How could we possibly imagine such a world? One might imagine a child who has been brought up in an environment where the countryside had been veiled by a heavy fog since the time he was born who wakes up one morning to find that the fog has lifted. Or one might imagine someone exploring an old house who finds that what he first took to be a solid wall is really a secret doorway behind which is a secret room. In both of these instances what is hidden or concealed is of the same order as what is originally apparent and can become visible in the same way with the removal of the veil. With the removal of the veil the secret too is removed and one could simply see what was concealed in the same way that one sees what is visible in the first place.

One might imagine as well a secret society operating invisibly within a larger society concealed behind a veil of secrecy. Imagine that this society is organized around a common representation of the sacred, and that what is sacred

is guarded with secret words and secret symbols. The preservation of such a society would depend upon the loyalty of initiates entrusted with keeping the sacred words and symbols secret. If the veil of secrecy were dropped, what was hidden would become visible, what was covered in silence would become audible, and could be seen and heard in the same way that all other words and symbols are seen and heard.

The situation would be different, however, if the hidden world was of a different order than the apparent world, if, for instance, the hidden world was not just out of sight, but invisible. Then imagining would be an impossibility, or a confusion, because one could not fill up the hidden world with similitudes from the apparent world. Images could not cross the bridge from one world to the other because the two worlds would be absolutely unlike. There would not be two visible worlds separated from each other by a veil, two worlds which could be seen in the same way. The apparent world would itself be a veil, or more precisely, it would be the image of the invisible world, perhaps in the same way that a "twitch" is the image of a "wink".

Is there a sense in which Christianity is a secret society? What do we make of the many references such as those to "a kingdom that is not of this world", and an invisible God who is somehow or other everywhere, yet nowhere apparent? If we are not offended by this manner of speaking and do not dismiss it as nonsense, then we must admit that

this kind of speech poses special problems for understanding. If Christianity is in a sense a secret society, it is not in the sense of the secret society earlier imagined. It does have sacred words, and the Christian community is organized around a common representation of the sacred, but the sacred is not secret in the same way. The sacred words are known to everyone, they appear in newspaper advertisements and can be heard from loudspeakers in department stores. Huge billboards publicize the sacred symbols and they can be seen flashing on neon lights. How could there be secrecy in the midst of such illumination, silence in the midst of so much noise?

In a journal entry, Kierkegaard writes:

> Christianity uses the same words and expressions, the same language we human beings use—but it understands each particular word the very opposite of what we human beings understand by it.[24]

According to this text the same word must admit of being understood in two very different ways, a "human" way and a "Christian" way. Unlike the kind of secret society earlier imagined, Christianity does not have a secret set of words and symbols. Rather it has a secret understanding of words and symbols which are also understood in an inferior way. Initiation into this society does not involve learning new words which previously were secret, but rather in learning to understand certain old words in a new way.

In the following section the double meaning and double understanding of Christian words and expressions will be discussed. This discussion is important since

Kierkegaard's views on understanding bear upon his views on Christianity and upon how he understands the purpose of his authorship. Paul Holmer, in his essay "On Understanding Kierkegaard", says that "whatever else might be said about Kierkegaard, this much at least is true, namely, that he proposed a theory of understanding which is novel and intrinsically significant."[25] In what follows Kierkegaard's "theory of understanding" will be described in its essentials. It is important to keep in mind, however, that he does not present his "theory of understanding" systematically. The texts which bear upon this matter are scattered throughout his works and invariably occur in contexts where others themes are dominant. Nonetheless there is an identifiable "theory of understanding" that informs his works. Beginning with an exposition of the double meaning of the concept of faith, this "theory" will be approached from a number of converging viewpoints.

Two Kinds of Faith

> Strangely enough, the examples in the New Testament (the gospels) which are of immediate faith—for example, the centurion, the hemorrhaging woman—here Luther is inexhaustible in his praise of such faith. But this is not really faith; this is a spontaneous devotedness to Christ (hardly ever as the very Son of God) as the man who may be able to help, and this immediacy has a remarkable power to persevere. But is this faith? It is not clearly evident that Christ means anything more to them than a man who is able to help. If their immediacy is faith, then, to be sure, every young girl sincerely in love has faith.[26] (Journals, IX A11)

Faith is an important category in Kierkegaard's

thought, as attested by the fact that it receives careful consideration in a number of major texts. Very often Kierkegaard's speech about faith is guarded, and for a very good reason. There is something slightly resembling faith, which people in confusion commonly call faith, which is not faith. In order to arrive at a proper understanding of faith it is necessary first to make one's way through this confusion. What is this confusion? Kierkegaard tells us:

> For we men are not so precise in the use of words, we often speak of faith when in the strictest Christian sense it is not faith. In every man, with differences due to natural endowment, a stronger or weaker spontaneity (immediacy) is inborn. The stronger, the more vitally powerful it is, the longer it can hold out against opposition. And this power of resistance, this vital confidence in oneself, in the world, in mankind, and (among other things) in God, we call faith. But this is not using the word in a strictly Christian sense. Faith is against understanding, faith is on the other side of death.[27]

A distinction is made here between faith understood as a determination of immediacy and faith understood in a "strictly Christian sense". No doubt the faith of immediacy is a beautiful thing, and one who is endowed with it may have good reason to consider himself lucky, but it is not Christian faith. The difference has to do with the manner in which faith is received, with the activity on the part of the individual receiving. The faith of immediacy has not been tried and meriting activity on the part of the receiver is minimal and incidental to the condition. It is a question of luck, or if you prefer, fate. Healthy blood, a good upbringing, and one acquires faith...entirely by

accident. Christian faith, to the contrary, could never be a prize in a game of dice. It requires work. This is not to say that it is in any way guaranteed by work. Kierkegaard never forgets Luther.

Kierkegaard finds a task in unmasking the confusion that conflates faith and immediacy. In part he attributes this confusion to Luther who, rightly concerned that the incommensurability of works and faith was in danger of being forgotten, stressed the inadequacy and insufficiency of works so far as to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Kierkegaard writes that Luther reduced faith to "something immediate, to a vitality, to a fidelity tenacious in its preservation of hope and confidence through the stages of this life, a fidelity for which different men are variously endowed."[28] It is the element of chance involved in this formulation that Kierkegaard finds objectionable. The positive value he sees in work is that it overcomes the arbitrariness of natural endowment and upbringing and makes faith at least in principle accessible to all men.

Work falls within the sphere of ethics and pertains to what an individual can do if he so wills. It is antithetical to aesthetics, which is concerned with what is done to an individual, with what an individual is immediately regardless of his willing. Just as ethics mediates the transition from aesthetic to religious Christianity, work mediates the transition from the faith (or despair) of

immediacy to faith proper. It is a necessary, although not sufficient requirement. What is the nature of this work?

In a journal entry, Kierkegaard writes:

> This is to say that most men never reach faith at all. They live a long time in immediacy or spontaneity, finally they advance to some reflection, and then they die. The exceptions begin the other way around; dialectical from childhood, that is, without immediacy, they begin with the dialectical, with reflection, and they go on living this way year after year(about as long as the others live in sheer immediacy) and then, at a more mature age, faith's possibility presents itself to them. For faith is immediacy or spontaneity after reflection. (VIII A649)

This definition of faith as immediacy after reflection occurs in several places and is extremely important for understanding Kierkegaard.[29] According to this formulation, there are certain stages that must be passed through before one arrives at faith. One cannot be born or brought up into faith. There is something which an individual must do himself, something he must assume responsibility for. In the passage quoted, two stages prior to faith are identified. Each has its work ahead of it. Immediacy has the work of reflection and reflection has the work of coming to a decision or resolution. Since reflection is antecedent to decision, and since normally people begin in immediacy, it is most appropriate to proceed by first discussing reflection as the work required of immediacy.

The relationship between reflection and immediacy is nicely exhibited with reference to the concepts of obedience and authority. Kierkegaard frequently uses the child to epitomise immediacy and the relationship between

immediacy and authority. He writes:

> the child has no difficulty at all in learning what the task is, what it has to do—for the child has only to obey. The task is a matter for the thought and consideration of the parents and superiors. As soon as the child is told what it is to do, then this is the task. How far it is right or wrong does not concern the child at all; it not only must not, but it dare not, spend even a single moment on that kind of reflection; on the contrary, it must obey at once.[30]

Certainly the authority who demands of the child that he must "obey at once", immediately, is exercising authority appropriately. It is assumed that the child does not have the maturity to make judgements about important things for himself.

While such unfailing and uncritical obedience is appropriate for children, the case is otherwise with adults. The soldier who excuses himself from responsibility by protesting that he was "only following orders" is judged as an adult. This was dramatically played out during the Nuremberg trials where it was argued that immediate obedience to authority is ethically reproachable.[31] Something more is demanded of the adult than is demanded of the child. For this reason it is important to ensure that faith is not confused with the immediate obedience appropriate to childhood.

On Kierkegaard's account of things, it is possible, and indeed necessary, to distinguish between blind obedience and faith. The difference between the two is with respect to how one relates to authority, i.e. whether the relation is

immediate or is qualified by reflection. In a journal entry Kierkegaard writes:

> When one says that faith depends upon authority and, so saying, thinks he has excluded the dialectical, this is simply not so; for the dialectical begins with asking how it happens that one submits to this authority, whether he himself understands why he has chosen it, whether it is a contingency, for in that case, the authority is not authority, not even for the believer, if he himself is not conscious that it is a contingency. (V A32)

Faith places the onus on the individual, and even if in the end he can produce few grounds for his position other than his own testimony, this is still something different than blind obedience, at least insofar as the testimony is his, and its acceptance has been mediated by his own act of appropriation.

The task of reflection involves bringing into question things which one has previously taken for granted, opinions which one has immediately received in one's upbringing, and so on. It is antithetical to the uncritical obedience of the child insofar as it looks to reasons which can justify one position over and against another. The opinions which one first accepted uncritically are put at a distance and examined as one set of possibilities among others. From the standpoint of reflection, the accident that one happened to have been brought up into one set of opinions rather than another does not suffice to constitute responsible adherence. In this respect, reflection signals the end of the naive belief which characterises the Eden of childhood.

The relationship between immediacy and reflection is complicated by the fact that immediacy offers a certain resistance to reflection. There is comfort in living uncritically under the auspices of an authority who relieves us of the anxiety of making decisions for ourselves. This is why Climacus says that reflection requires a "dialectical fearlessness".

> The spirit of dialectical fearlessness is not so easily acquired; and the sense of isolation which remains despite the conviction of right, the sadness of the parting from admired and trustworthy authorities, is the line of demarcation which marks the threshold of its acquirement. (Postscript, 15-6)

It is not merely the overwhelming self-evidence of our inherited beliefs that inhibits reflection. It requires a certain amount of courage to question the authority we have been subject to in our upbringing. This was demonstrated by the resistance Socrates met with in his daily efforts to get the people within his sphere of influence to reflect upon their beliefs. Reflection introduces uncertainty and anxiety.

If we accept that faith has commonly been confused with immediacy or blind obedience, we can understand why many people have feared reason as being antagonistic to faith. A belief that has never been tested or tried is necessarily held in dread lest something happen to threaten its dubious authorization. In the next moment perhaps reflection will take it away or subvert it. When faith is thought of as an immediacy, then indeed reason and faith are mutually exclusive. Reflection would interrogate blind obedience and

demand reasons for submission to authority. Especially in the event that authority was hiding something, the supression of reason would be necessary.

Unlike blind obedience, faith has nothing to fear from reason. It is open to reason and to future possibilities that might prove to be significant. It is not as if reason could hit upon something previously not attended to or concealed which could subvert faith. In a journal entry, Kierkegaard writes:

> When reflection is completely exhausted, then faith begins. Here again it is just as foolish to come with probabilities or arguments, because in order to arrive at faith all such temporary devices must be exhausted. Everything which reflection can hit upon faith has already thought through. (V A28)

Unlike blind obedience, faith has already run the gamut of reflection and is open-eyed with respect to that which could possibly count against it. Thus Kierkegaard does not argue for faith without reason, but rather for faith after reason. In another journal entry Kierkegaard writes:

> No matter how one conceives of simplicity after (on the other side of) reflection, it is never exactly like the simplicity of immediacy or spontaneity; it will be recognizable precisely by the continuous accompaniment of reflection, but it will be ethically subordinated. (X² A279)

It is the presence or absence of accompanying reflection which serves as the basis for distinguishing between faith and immediacy. Of course, "the continuous accompaniment of reflection" does not mean that, in a temporal sense, someone adhering to a position in faith will always be reflecting

upon it. Reflection accompanies faith as its history, just as a person's past accompanies him as memory, even when he is not actually remembering. The significant thing is that it is there potentially and can be summoned at will, which is altogether different from its not having been at all.

Since faith is after reflection, there must be some limitation to reflection with respect to the acquisition of faith. It is important to balance Kierkegaard's relentless polemic against immediacy with his equally relentless polemic against reflection. Reflection alone cannot solve the problems of living. Confronted with the multifarious possibilities reflection presents to us, it is necessary to choose. When a person's development is arrested by prolonged immediacy, then indeed reflection is a necessary "gadfly" to set things in motion, but when a person is lost in reflection, then something else is necessary. This is the problem Climacus has to contend with in the Postscript.

> In Greece, as in the youth of philosophy generally, it was found difficult to win through to the abstract and to leave existence, which always gives the particular; in modern times, on the other hand, it has become difficult to reach existence. The process of abstraction is easy enough for us, but we also desert existence more and more, and the realm of pure thought is the extreme limit of such desertion. (Postscript, 295)

In the present age we attain reflection with relative ease but at the price of becoming forgetful of our rootedness in a particular existence. Reflection distances us from our immediate and particular situation in the world. This is a laudable accomplishment since the objectivity attained makes

possible increased understanding and improvement of our situation. However this same objectivity can also leave someone indifferent about the particular existence he happens to have been given and brought up into.

In Authority and Revelation Kierkegaard discusses the kind of problem reflection leads to when it becomes disembodied and loses its anchor in the world.

> Every living being, every existence, has its hidden life in the root from which the life-force proceeds and produces growth. It is well enough known to physiologists that nothing is more injurious to digestion than constant relection upon digestion. And so it is also with relation to the spiritual life the most injurious thing when reflection, as it too often does, goes amiss and instead of being used to advantage brings the concealed labour of the hidden life out into the open and attacks the fundamental principles themselves. In case a marriage were to reflect upon the reality of marriage, it would become eo ipso a pretty poor marriage; for the tasks of married life are employed by reflection to eat away the foundation. In case a man who has chosen a definite position in life were to reflect constantly whether this position were the right one, he would become eo ipso a sorry partner in business. (29-30)

Kierkegaard is very sensitive to a certain misplaced emphasis being placed on reflection in the present age. He recognizes that questioning and doubting are more destructive than helpful if they do not have a firm point of departure to which they can return. Adler, who is really quite adept at reflection, is diagnosed as suffering from a spiritual dizziness owing to the fact that he lacks an anchor in the world. This dizziness is manifested in his indefiniteness and lack of consistency. The remedy for this dizziness is the ethical:

> What can check this dizziness? What can master that desparate supertension of the instant? The ethical can. When in every moment of one's life there is work to be done, a task, when often enough, alas, there is a serious concern for the fact that one has not attended to his work as one should—thenthere is no time to be fantastic or to give oneself to fantastic speculation.(Authority and Revelation, 131)

Ethics demands of the individual, in the first instance, that he detach himself from his particular situation in reflection so as to attain a certain objectivity. This done, however, ethics continues one step further and demands of the individual in the next instance that he resolutely return to his point of departure and attend to the particular tasks required of him.

The limits of reflection are best illustrated with reference to its role in action. Reflection can multiply and clarify possibilities, it can weigh them according to preferred criteria, but it cannot out of itself produce a decision. For this something more is required. Shakespeare's Hamlet demonstrates this dramatically. Hamlet is a luckless player in reflection's hopeless waiting game. He waits vainly for reflection to hit upon a magic possibility, a possibility so overwhelming that he would be relieved of the burden of having to make a decision. Nonetheless he cannot escape the haunting awareness that the onus is not on the weight of the possibilities, but rather on the will that must ultimately decide upon one possibility over and against others.

For the reason that reflection is commonly credited

with powers properly belonging to faith, Kierkegaard stresses that faith requires an objective uncertainty. It is because Hamlet does not, and in principle cannot know which possibility is the best that he is open to the possibility of faith. If the best possibility were a matter of objective certainty, he would be relieved of the burden of making a decision. The possibility of faith is premised upon the fact that there is a limit to what reflection (reason) can know. This is the concern of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason wherein he sets out "to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith."[32] Matters pertaining to faith are matters which, from the standpoint of knowledge, are objectively uncertain. It is because there is a range of human possibilities which remain fundamentally uncertain that faith occupies a higher place than reflection(reason). This uncertainty is not due to an imperfection of our reason, but is a permanent feature of the human condition.

In an essay titled"Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic", Cornelio Fabro argues that Kierkegaard is quite orthodox in his understanding of the relationship between faith and reason.[33] He argues that Kierkegaard was concerned that what is "essentially a task of the will has become an affair of the understanding, and what is essentially a dialectical situation has become a direct and immediate movement."[34] For this reason Kierkegaard believed it necessary to map out the respective territories of faith

and reason, and Fabro shows that he does so "faithful to the Thomistic principle of the specification of acts by means of objects."[35] Etienne Gilson's delineation of these spheres in the following passage from Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages is clear and to the point:

> According to its very definition, faith implies an assent of the intellect to that which the intellect does not see to be true, either as one of the first principles, or as one of their necessary conclusions. Consequently, an act of faith cannot be caused by a rational evidence, but entails an intervention of the will. On the contrary, in scientific knowledge, my assent is sufficiently and completely determined by its very object. Whence there follows that, in Thomas Aquinas' own words, since "it is impossible that one and the same thing should be believed and seen by the same person,...it is equally impossible for one and the same thing to be an object of science and of belief for the same person." In short, one and the same thing cannot be at one and the same time both an object of science and an object of faith.[36]

In this context we can understand Kierkegaard's contempt for those who seek to "prove" Christian doctrine. If it could be proved, and he was certain that it could not, then assent to it would not involve faith.

Faith exists in proportion to the probability of its object. The more probable the object, the less faith is required. This can be illustrated with reference to trust. Here we must be careful to distinguish between trust and naivety. An immediate feeling of certainty is not trust. Candide can be judged naive because he fails to consider relevant reasons and arguments that could count against his trust. For trust some reflection is required. Suppose then, a candidate who approaches someone soliciting that person's

trust. This person is no Candide. He asks the candidate for reasons as to why he should be trusted. The candidate enumerates countless cases where he has been trusted and completed that trust, produces letters of reference from trustworthy sources, and so on. Such persuasive evidence would certainly make it probable that the candidate was a trustworthy person, but it would make it difficult to trust him, or if you prefer, not to trust him. The difficulty stems from the fact that a certainty is virtually guaranteed. Imagine another candidate much the same as the first. He too enumerates all of his trustworthy characteristics, but adds at the end that there have been others in history who have produced even more compelling evidence of trustworthiness and betrayed the trust. Suppose he concludes by saying, "Nonetheless, and is spite of this—I can be trusted." Then trust would be possible. It would have faced the uncertainty.

In this section two kinds of faith have been distinguished and it has been argued that from Kierkegaard's point of view one of these is improperly so termed. Admission must be made that this examination of faith is far from comprehensive. In part this is because faith is an extremely difficult concept to understand and in part it is because faith has been used as an example of how Christian concepts admit of being understood in two very different ways. On the one hand, the word "faith" is loosely used to describe a certain immediacy. This understanding of the concept of faith is a misunderstanding. On the other hand, faith has

been described as a resoluteness of the will in the face of objective uncertainty. On this account a certain amount of work is requisite to faith and certain stages must be passed through prior to its acquisition. Paul Holmer, in his essay "Kierkegaard and Religious Propositions", summarises Kierkegaard's point of view on this matter with acute brevity:

> Agreeing with the wise men of all time, he finds that the movement in human life which is mature and in the direction of salvation is out of the subjective and nonreflective ("the fuzz of wishfullness," as James said) and into the reflective and the objective, but then finally back into the passional and subjective again.[37]

Whether it is defined as a subjectivity after objectivity, or as an immediacy after reflection, it is important that it be distinguished from a subjectivity before objectivity, or an immediacy before reflection.

Understanding and Understanding

> The Christian language uses the same words we men use, and in that respect desires no change. But its use of them is qualitatively different from our use of them; it uses the words inversely, for Christianity makes manifest one sphere more or a higher sphere than the one in which we men naturally live, and in this sphere ordinary human language is reflected inversely. For example, Christianity says that to lose the earthly is a gain, that to possess it is a loss. We also use the words loss and gain. But we do not in any way include the sphere of the spirit and therefore by "loss" and "gain" we understand the opposite of what Christianity understands. And so we let Christianity talk away—and afterwards preach it in our own language and call it Christianity. (Journals, XI[2] A37).

In countless texts Kierkegaard makes reference to something that resembles understanding, but is not understanding. In sundry places this pseudo-understanding is polemically termed "spiritlessness", "chatter", "immediate

understanding", "rote-learning", and so on. Kierkegaard's point in this polemicising is to indicate negatively the requirements for understanding proper. In this section a number of these characterizations of pseudo-understanding will be considered in order to highlight the requirements for understanding proper through juxtaposition.

In a journal entry titled "A Christian Auditing", Kierkegaard lends us an interesting analogy for understanding the problem of the present age with respect to understanding religious language:

> What money is in the finite world, concepts are in the world of spirit. All transactions are conducted with them.
>
> When it so happens that generation after generation everyone takes over the concepts he got from the previous generation—and then devotes his days and his time to enjoying this life, works for finite goals, etc.—it all too easily happens that the concepts are gradually distorted, become entirely different from what they were originally, come to mean something entirely different, come to be like counterfeit money. (XI A36)

In virtue of the fact that Christian concepts are in widespread circulation, everyone has a familiarity with them. Each generation inherits them from the preceding generation. Just as money has value only in relation to something that stands behind it and guarantees it, so too concepts have meaning only in relation to the wealth of experience in terms of which they can be cashed out. When there is no experience standing behind a concept it is like counterfeit money.

When there is an increase in the amount of fiduciary money issued, beyond what is guaranteed by a country's

tangible resources, the resulting situation we term inflation.[38] The money circulating is worth less. A similar situation prevails with respect to the use of religious concepts. In the Postscript Climacus writes:

> While the statesmen look forward with apprehension to a threatened general bankruptcy of the governments, we face perhaps a more serious bankruptcy in the world of the spirit; for the concepts have gradually been emasculated, and the words have been made to mean anything and everything, so that the disputes are sometimes as ridiculous as the agreements. For it is always ludicrous to engage in controversy on the basis of loose words, and to come to agreement on the basis of loose words. But when even the most stable and fixed meanings have become loose and vacillating, what portends? Just as a toothless old man is reduced to mumbling through the gums, so modern discourse about Christianity has lost the vigor that can come only from an energetically sustained terminology, and the whole is reduced to a toothless twaddle. (325)

With the succession of generations, Christian concepts have become assimilated into the conversational language of everyday. Whereas originally they had precise meanings and definite rules governing their legitimate employment, with the passage of time and the forgetfullness of their original reference, their meaning has come to be inflated. That once these concepts had "stable and fixed meanings" is not so much a testimony to the expertise of the early Christians in logic as it is to the fact that then something definite was at stake. Then when a man said that he was a Christian he was risking something. When something important is at stake in our use of words we tend to think about them more carefully. Recall that Kierkegaard faults Adler for using "the Christian language of concepts as a careless conversational

language."[39]

Invariably Kierkegaard characterizes the careless use of religious concepts in terms of an absence, in terms of something that is lacking. Often he speaks of this as the absence of a definite thought or experience connected with the concepts we use. He says that Adler "is in such confusion regarding the categories that he does not himself know what he says, because he associates no sharp thought with the words."[40] This absence accounts for his tendency to waver in his responses to the authorities regarding the concept of revelation. There is no definite thought persisting and enduring throughout his various acts of intending, no sameness of reference in relation to which they would all be connected and consistent. Such a definite thought would serve to organize different contextual uses of the term "revelation" in much the same way that an object referred to organizes various instances of the naming of the object. We encounter little difficulty with names such as"chair" and "table" at least in part because the objects or sorts of objects they refer to are quite tangible. Either one knows what a chair is or one does not, and it is very easy to find out. It is otherwise with concepts such as "revelation". Here the referent is not so tangible and so the use of the concept is susceptible to greater imprecision.

In general, the more tangible the subject matter under discussion is, the easier to discern whether or not someone knows what they are talking about. This proportion

bears upon possible methods for testing understanding.

> Perhaps the sophistical is all too characteristic of our age, for the fact that we bring into discussion the greatest problems in order to encourage men who are the most insignificant and devoid of any thought to take part in the discussion. Let us not forget that noble reformer, that simple wise man of Greece, who had in fact to deal with the Sophists, let us not forget that his strength lay in chasing the Sophists out of their roguish game with the abstract and the all-embracing, that his strength lay in making conversation so concrete that everyone who wanted to talk about some prodigious subject(the government of the State in general, about educational theory in general, etc.)before he knew how to put in a word was led to talk about himself—revealing whether he knew something, or didn't know anything. (Authority and Revelation, 32)

We can understand why Kierkegaard, who was quite suspicious of the manner in which religious concepts were understood in his time, would be reticent to begin right away with the highest things. In a journal entry he writes:

> Everyone possesses the art of being able to speak his mother tongue; there are words in his mother tongue which express the highest things. Inasmuch, then, as every native-born person can speak the language, he can also say the word. On the other hand, if the sage uses the same word, it looks as if he had wasted his life by not having advancedbeyond it.But the person who is very ingenious in listening when people are speaking also discovers what a fraud takes place when definite thoughts are not attached to the words...The simplest of men is able to say: There is a God; and a child names the name of God, yet without perceiving that it is a task requiring a thinker's unmost effort to attach a definite thought to this word. (VI A15)

Kierkegaard's cautious use of the language of Christianity can be attributed to two things, or more precisely to the juxtaposition of two things. On the one hand, to his awareness that religious language is easily susceptible to misunderstanding and misuse, and on the other, to his

awareness of the proper requirements for understanding and using religious language.

While there is no fool-proof test for determining whether or not someone knows what they are talking about, there are various tell-tale signs. When someone mouths the rhetoric of the new birth and gives testimony to a profound conversion, our suspicion is likely to be aroused in the event that the person then goes on to conduct himself just as he always had. It is quite possible, and even common, for someone whose speech is consistent and internally coherent nevertheless to be in contradiction. This is so especially in the case of religious language, which has definite implications for how one ought to comport oneself. Because there is an existential referent to this kind of speech, a blatant contradiction between speech and deeds is possible, and to a certain extent, unavoidable. A distance between speech and deeds is a sign which arouses our suspicion. Perhaps someone is merely deceiving others into believing that he understands, or perhaps deceiving himself into believing that he understands. In the Postscript Climacus suggests a means for catching such a deceiver:

> Merely let him speak: if he is a deceiver, he will contradict himself precisely when he is engaged in the most solemn assurances. The contradiction will not be a direct one, but consists in the failure of the speech to include a consciousness of what the speech professes directly to assert. Objectively the assertion may be quite straight-forward; the man's only fault is that he speaks by rote. (152)

When not reduplicated in deed, in existence, religious

speech rings empty and lacks its proper fulfillment.

The distance between speech and deeds with respect to understanding has been a concern for many writers for many different reasons. Aristotle, for instance, makes reference to it in his classic discussion of unrestraint in the Nicomachean Ethics. There the following question arises: How can we understand the fact that someone can know what the right thing to do is and nevertheless fail to do it? In order to account for this difficulty, he finds it necessary to distinguish between two ways of knowing something. He likens the kind of knowledge the unrestrained person has and contradicts in deed to the kind of knowledge possessed by those who are "asleep or mad or drunk."[41] He continues:

> Their using the language of knowledge is no proof that they possess it. Persons in the states mentioned repeat propositions of geometry and verses of Empedocles; students who have just begun a subject reel off its formulae, though they do not yet know their meaning, for knowledge has to become part of the tissue of the mind, and this takes time. Hence we must conceive that men who fail in self-restraint talk in the same way as actors speaking a part.[42]

It is interesting to note that for both Kierkegaard and Aristotle, "the language of knowledge", the consistency and internal coherence of discourse, is no guarantee that there is an understanding, even though it may be difficult to decide one way or other.

Kierkegaard, like Aristotle, is concerned to point out that someone can say all of the right things and yet not understand himself in what he says. It is likely that the Platonic distinction between true opinion and knowledge was

intended to account for this basic fact of human understanding. Using this distinction to illuminate Kierkegaard's thought, it could be said that in Christendom most men possess the true opinions regarding Christianity, most have memorized the formulas correctly, and yet something remains dreadfully absent. In the Postscript Climacus writes:

> In an age of knowledge, when all men are Christians and know what Christianity is, it is only too easy to use the sacred names without attaching any thought to them, to recite the Christian truth by rote without having the slightest impression of it. (252)

Just as "students who have just begun a subject reel off its formulae" without knowing their meaning, many "recite the Christian truth by rote" and yet know not whereof they speak.

When upbringing was earlier discussed in relation to the first education in Plato's Republic, it was said that upbringing into a proposed set of opinions occurs through imitation and habituation. We initially learn by imitating models which exert some sort of influence upon us. At least initially, we do not understand the meaning of what we imitate. Certain inadequacies are characteristic of one whose understanding of something is limited to imitation. This is a major theme in The Concept of Dread. Discussing the typical Christian in Christendom, Vigilius Haufniensis writes:

> He knows it all, he bows before the holy, truth is for him an ensemble of ceremonies, he talks about presenting himself before the throne of God, of how many times one must bow, he knows everything the same way as does the

> pupil who is able to demonstrate a mathematical proposition with the letters ABC, but not when they are changed to DEF. He is therefore in dread whenever he hears something not arranged in the same order. (124)

Such a person's understanding is limited by the initial model set up for imitation. The same would be true of someone who could demonstrate a general property of triangles with a scalene triangle but not with an isosceles. As long as such a person never encountered an isosceles triangle it may never be suspected that he did not understand the property.

Using Plato's language, we would say that such a person was limited to understanding in terms of images and has not grasped the idea or general principle which would free him from his dependence upon the models he had first learned to imitate. Given this limitation, we would not want to say that the person really understood. Similarly, in the event that someone were merely repeating by rote rules and opinions he had thoughtlessly assimilated we would not want to credit him with understanding.

In his Critique of Pure Reason Kant provides an interesting account of the inadequacy of imitation. He writes:

> For although an abundance of rules borrowed from the insight of others may indeed be proffered to, and as it were grafted upon, a limited understanding, the power of rightly employing them must belong to the learner himself; and in the absence of such a natural gift no rule that may be prescribed to him for this purpose can ensure against misuse. (177-8)

We would want to say that understanding a rule would involve our being able to apply the rule creatively in a context

other than the one in which we had been taught to apply the rule. In Authority and Revelation Kierkegaard discusses this with respect to the requirements for understanding a thought.

> Understanding a thought is something like being able to decline a paradigm: one can also decline all the words which come under that paradigm. If one has understood a thought, one can, by using it in many "examples," seem to make many profound remarks, and yet the many are really repititions, and hence...one is not justified in saying that he has learned many declensions because he has learned the many words which come under the same declension. So it is too with having understood one thought; if the repititions are not to be tedious, there must be added a poetical factor which makes the application of the examples aesthetically worthy. (124-5)

Understanding which is worthy of the name is something different than slotting our experience into preordained patterns like unformed dough to be processed blindly with cookie cutters. It involves something more than the mindless application of a set of rules or categories.

For the reason that understanding based upon imitation is limited by the instances one has encountered, it is unable to appreciate the new or the exceptional. It is enslaved to memory and to mindless repitition based upon imitation of familiar models or paradigms. This point is poignantly made in the first book of the Republic.[43] Cephalus, and then Polemarchus, suggest definitions of justice which Socrates subjects to careful scrutiny. In each case he brings out an inadequacy in the proposed definitions by posing an exceptional circumstance which the definition fails to accomodate. When Polemarchus proposes that justice is always telling the truth, a neat formulation enjoying widespread

acceptance, Socrates counters with the case of a person who is not in his right mind who asks to be told where his weapons are. In this event it would be "unjust" to apply the general rule. The first book proceeds negatively in this way and against each attempt to reduce justice to a simple formula Socrates poses the exception. His purpose is not to arrive at a definition of justice comprehensive enough to assimilate all possible exceptions, but rather to elicit the insight that justice always transcends its formulations and therefore expects the exceptional.

Examples are similar to definitions with respect to their uses and abuses in coming to understand something. They are useful heuristically as steps to take us to a height from which understanding is more accessible, but they can also impede our progress if we fail to recognize them as means to an end. In a passage immediately following the one earlier quoted, Kant notes this double-sidedness of examples:

> Such sharpening of the judgement is indeed the one great benefit of examples. Correctness and precision of intellectual insight, on the other hand, they more usually somewhat impair. For only very seldom do they adequately fulfil the requirements of the rule(as casus in terminis). Besides, they often weaken that effort which is required of the understanding to comprehend properly the rules in their universality, in independence of the particular circumstances of experience, and so accustom us to use rules rather as formulas than as principles.(Critique of Pure Reason, 178)

Anyone who has ever had experience with legal-minded bureaucrats will readily understand Kant's distinction

between using rules as formulas and using rules as principles. Bureaucrats are notorious for their mindless reliance upon formulas without understanding the principle behind the formula, sometimes even in contradiction to the principle. While examples can assist us to understanding a principle, they can also foster a lethargic understanding which lazily rests upon imitation at the expense of understanding the principle.

There is an interesting relationship between parasitic reliance upon formulas or examples and authority. Often the weight of authority is placed upon the impersonal, as when someone claims that they are merely applying the rules and have no responsibility for the application. This would be the case if the human being existed in the mode of a computer. There is no question of a computer understanding the rules it follows; it does not interpret its programme. Computers follow and apply rules literally. This is why they are often ineffective in dealing with exceptions, with instances that differ literally but not essentially from those programmed into their repetoire. It is otherwise with human beings, however, even though human beings sometimes tend to act in the manner of a computer. Human beings are capable of understanding the principle behind the rule, the point behind the example. This places the authority upon the person who understands, and not on the rules or formulas.

With regard to many matters, understanding is a

credential and justification for authority. This is confirmed by common sense. We confer authority upon someone who understands the subject relevant to the exercise of the authority. We denounce as fraudulent someone whose claimed authority is proved to lack a basis in understanding. One who lacks understanding is parasitic upon the authority of others who understand, or even worse, pretend to understand. Such a person is limited to imitation and uncritical obedience. One who understands, however, has an originality and is not restricted to reproducing the products of respected authorities because he can himself produce fresh applications from his understanding. In The Concept of Dread, Vigilius Haufniensis makes a similar point with reference to the requirements for understanding human psychology.

> Oftentimes the examples adduced in books on psychology lack the proper psychological-poetic authority. They stand there as isolated facts notarially attested, but precisely for this reason one does not know whether to laugh or weep at the attempt of such a lonely stickler to form some sort of a general rule. A man who with any degree of seriousness has concerned himself with psychology and psychological observations has acquired a general human pliability which makes him capable of being able to construct his example at once, one which, even though it has not authorization of the factual sort, has nevertheless a different kind of authority. As the psychological observer ought to be more agile than the tightrope dancer in order to be able to insinuate himself under the skin of other people and to imitate their attitudes, as his silence in confidential moments ought to be seductive and voluptuous in order that the hidden thing may find pleasure in slipping out and chatting quietly with itself in this fictitious inattention and quiet, so he ought also to have a poetical primitiveness in his soul to be able to create at once the totality of the rule out of that which in the individual is always present only partially and irregularly. Then when he has perfected himself he will

> not need to fetch his examples from literary repertoires and warmed-over, half-dead reminiscences but draws his observations directly and freshly from the water, still flopping and displaying the play of their colors. (49)

One whose understanding of psychology is merely rote-learning can at best accurately reproduce what others have produced on their own authority. One often finds that among students who have just begun to study a subject matter there is a tendency to speak in footnotes and quotations. They are unable to go beyond the examples provided for them and cannot produce fresh applications. When one understands, however, one has the experience of understanding before oneself at all times to consult as an original source for new applications and examples.

What is here said confirms the old adage that he who understands something is able to express it in his own words. Understanding requires something more than thoughtless repitition of what others have produced. To understand is to find examples within one's own experience that testify to the thing being understood. Our experience is far from being a matter of indifference for understanding, since it is with our experience that we flesh out the thing to be understood. He who understands need not emptily repeat formulas and definitions because he can refer to his own experience of the subject in question and, consulting this experience, redefine and reformulate for himself.

Insofar as understanding replaces uncritical reliance upon authority, the movement toward and attainment of it is

liberating. This direct proportion between understanding and liberation is at the heart of the enthusiasm that swept the West during that time we call the Enlightment. It is the thrust behind Kant's hopeful challenge, "Have the courage to use your reason!" which became the motto of the period.[44] This proportion is the key to understanding the qualification "without authority" which accompanies Kierkegaard's texts. Kierkegaard finds it necessary to surrender his authority in order to repel idolatrous disciples and to facilitate and encourage understanding. The logic is that if there is truth in what he has to say, then his reader should be able to understand it for himself. To this end, his conspicuous presence would be an impediment for the reason that indolent or cowardly readers might uncritically accept what he said on his authority alone and fail to produce the required understanding for themselves. This is why Climacus says at the end of the Postscript that one who understands his text "can understand that understanding is revocation."[45] The text is an aid to understanding, perhaps in the same way that examples work heuristically to facilitate grasp of principle. Once the principle is grasped, the examples used to attain insight into it are redundant or superfluous. Climacus writes:

> So then the book is superfluous; let no one therefore take the pains to appeal to it as an authority; for he who thus appeals to it has eo ipso misunderstood it. (546)

In Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche strikes out at idolatry from a similar angle. It is interesting to compare the

following aphorism from that text with the above quotation from the Postscript.

> Posthumous men—like me, for instance—are not so well understood as timely men, but they are listened to better. More precisely, we are never understood—and hence our authority...[46]

The striking point these texts have in common is that they both address the relationship between authority and understanding.

If the subject matter of a text were so esoteric that only a few readers could reasonably be expected to have had experience relating to it, then the authority of an author would be a necessary substitute for the experience for those who lacked it. The obtrusive presence of an authority would be superfluous for a text such as the Postscript for the reason that its subject matter is readily accessible to all readers. Think of this in relation to what it is to understand a particular pain. A pain can be understood through two very different accesses. The access to a pain can be through second-hand experience, as in the instance when all we have to go on is someone else's description of the pain. It can also be through first-hand experience of a pain, in which case the understanding will be of a different sort. If we have experienced the pain for ourselves, we are no longer dependent upon someone else's description.

The difference between the understandings arrived at through these very different accesses is like the difference between imagining and experiencing something. If we have not

directly experienced something ourselves, our only recourse is imagination; we try to hit upon an appropriate similitude from which to approach the thing from something which it is like. If, for instance, we were trying to imagine a particular pain, we might interview people who have had the pain, or perhaps study the grimaces of people actually experiencing the pain. In doing this, we would be constructing a text from which to read the pain and our understanding of that pain would be mediated by the constructed text. If, however, we had experienced the pain at first-hand, such a similitude would not be necessary because the experience itself would be the text upon which to base our understanding. A similitude would be superfluous. This does not mean, however, that there is first some sort of bare experience which later comes to be brought under concepts of the understanding. Certainly an experience is in part constituted by the concepts under which it is subsumed. The point here is simply that it is possible, and in the case of religious concepts common, for people to use the concepts without having had the experience to which they properly refer.

There is a great deal of difference between these two ways of understanding something, such that in some instances, the first kind of understanding may actually be a misunderstanding. My reader does not have to rely upon my word alone for this because no doubt he has experienced this difference for himself. Probably he can recall an occasion

where he had experienced something at first-hand for the first time which he had previously only imagined and found the difference to be so pronounced that in relation to and in light of the experience, the previous understanding appeared to be a misunderstanding. In a journal entry Kierkegaard warns us of "the infinite difference which exists between understanding something in possibility and understanding something in actuality." He distinguishes the two in terms of the role of the imagination in each:

> The fact is that when I understand something in possibility, I do not become essentially changed, I remain in the old ways and make use of my imagination; when it becomes actuality, then it is I who am changed, and now the question is whether I can preserve myself. When it is a matter of understanding in possibility, I have to strain my imagination to the limit; when it is a matter of understanding the same thing in actuality, I am spared all exertion in regard to my imagination; actuality is placed very close to me, all too close; it has, as it were, swallowed me, and the question now is whether I can rescue myself from it. (X^2 A202)

In this context, Kierkegaard likely has the understanding and misunderstanding of Christianity in mind. On his understanding, those who call themselves Christians are, for the most part, only so in imagination. He believes the Christianity of his day to be a lifeless possibility which those in Chrisendom fail to make actual in their day to day existence.

Coming to understand Christianity in actuality would require a corresponding change in one's existence. Paul Holmer succinctly states Kierkegaard's case in the following:

The difference between cognitive assent to the truth of

> the possibility and being a Christian is the distance between conceiving a passion and being passionate.[47]

Someone who is not sensitive to the distance between the two poles here set in opposition, who is not painfully aware of the difference between imagining and experiencing a pain, could hardly be said to properly understand the things they pertain to.

In the Postscript, the difference between these two kinds of understanding is paralleled in the distinction between objective and subjective reflection. Climacus writes:

> For an objective reflection the truth becomes an object, something objective, and thought must be pointed away from the subject. For a subjective reflection the truth becomes a matter of appropriation, of inwardness, of subjectivity, and thought must probe more and more deeply into the subject and subjectivity. (171)

The difference between these two comes to light most clearly and dramatically when the role of the subject in each mode of reflecting or understanding is thematized as the differentiating factor. What role does the subject play in each case and how does his particular existence figure in the understanding that emerges?

The distinguishing mark of objective reflection is that the existence of the subject doing the reflecting is regarded as being incidental or a matter of indifference. Climacus explains:

> 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, 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. (Postscript, 173)

This type of reflection is best exemplified by scientific enquiry for which the enquiring subject should in principle be interchangeable with any other human being in general who presumably would arrive at the same results if the same method were followed.

Climacus points to the limitation of such kind of reflection with reference to death as the matter enquired into.

> For example, the problem of what it means to die. I know concerning this what people in general know about it; I know that I shall die if I take a dose of sulphuric acid, and also if I drown myself, or go to sleep in an atmosphere of coal gas, and so forth...
>
> Nevertheless, in spite of this almost extraordinary knowledge or facility in knowledge, I can by no means regard death as something I have understood. (Postscript, 147-8)

Enquired into in this manner, death is viewed disinterestedly and objectively as a remote and abstract possibility. As such it is something understood by fools and wise men alike. Every schoolboy knows all about death. It is a fact of the human condition that applies equally and indifferently to human beings in general. Understood as an indifferent fact, one only understands that "All men must die." Climacus continues:

> But the fact of my own death is not for me by any means such a something in general, although for others the fact of my death may indeed be something of that sort. (149)

Something strange and important is absent from the understanding that "all men must die" which dreadfully becomes present to the one to whom the doctor solemnly pronounces, "Thou art dying."

What is it that is absent in the kind of understanding that emerges out of objective reflection? Perhaps this absence can be filled in with reference to a favourite story of Kierkegaard's earlier quoted.[48] According to the Biblical text recounting the story of David and Nathan, Nathan narrates a story to David which describes a man who, through abuse of his power, arranges for the death of an innocent man to further his own selfish ends. Upon hearing this story, David, "understanding" the injustice done, becomes indignant and promises that justice will be brought to bear upon the perpetrator of this crime. Sensitive to a dreadful absence in David's "understanding", Nathan continues, "Thou, O King, art the man." In <u>For Self-Examination</u> Kierkegaard comments on this story.

> I imagine that David has listened to this attentively, has given expression to his opinion, of course without intruding his personality (subjectively), but impersonally (objectively) has duly appreciated this charming little work. There was perhaps a particular trait which he thought might have been different, he perhaps proposed an expression more happily chosen, perhaps also pointed out a little fault in the plan, praised the prophet's masterly delivery of the story, his voice, the play of his features, expressed himself, in short, as we tultured people are accustomed to do when we criticize a sermon delivered before a cultured

> congregation, that is, a sermon which itself also is objective.
>
> Then says the prophet to him, 'Thou art the man.' Behold, this tale which the prophet recited was a story, but this, 'Thou art the man', was another story—it was a transition to the subjective. (63)

What distinguishes subjective reflection from objective reflection is the reference to the subject, the existential application. Properly speaking, it is not a "what" that is absent from objective reflection, it is a "who".

Objective reflection requires the virtual annihilation of the subject whose subjectivity is viewed as being a potentially distorting factor. Kierkegaard does not categorically dismiss this kind of reflection; he merely seeks to establish its limits. His point is that there are phenomena that cannot properly be understood in that manner, for which such understanding is in effect misunderstanding. Sin is another such phenomenon. In The Concept of Dread, Vigilius Haufniensis writes:

> How sin came into the world every man understands by himself alone; if he would learn it from another, he eo ipso misunderstands it. The only science which can do a little is psychology, which nevertheless concedes that it does not, that it can and will not, explain more. If any science could explain it, everything would be brought to confusion. That the man of science ought to forget himself is perfectly true, but for this reason it is so fortunate that sin is not a scientific problem, and therefore the man of science is no more obliged than is any speculator to forget how sin came into the world. (46)

Approaching sin scientifically, one might construct a taxonomy listing all the various types of sin, assigning them relative weights and charting their frequencies, perhaps even establishing correlations between different

types of sins and genetic or economic conditions. Such knowledge may be of some use, but it is not the kind of understanding appropriate to sin. To understand sin, at least insofar as it admits of being understood, one would have to make the transition from the objective to the subjective, from possibility to actuality, from sin as an objective possibility to the recognition of oneself in that possibility. David "understood" the sin of the man Nathan described, but he did not "understand" its application to him.

Indeed, the word "application" aptly signifies what is absent from the kind of understanding Kierkegaard is concerned to distinguish from understanding proper. In The Concept of Dread Vigilius Haufniensis writes:

> To understand and to understand are two things, is an old saying and a true one. Inwardness is an understanding, but in concreto the question is how this understanding is to be understood. To understand a speech is one thing, to understand the deitikose implied in it is another; it is one thing for a man to understand what he himself says, to understand himself in what he says is another thing. (126)

In a footnote to this text, Lowrie suggests that the word "deitikose", which Kierkegaard coined, means "personal application" in this context.[49] Literally the word means "pointing out", "indicative", and in other places Lowrie translates it as "strikingly appropriate".[50]

Hans-Georg Gadamer, who shares Kierkegaard's passionate concern for rescuing the integrity of understanding, is also emphatic about the relationship between understanding and application. In Truth and Method he argues that

application, which had been recognized as essential to understanding by earlier thinkers such as Aristotle, came to be "forgotten" and even derogated in the modern world.[51] In complete agreement with Kierkegaard on this point, he traces this forgetting to the rise of modern science with its forceful emphasis on the objective and the impersonal. Kierkegaard's often repeated criticism of the present age is that people have forgotten what it is to exist. He is concerned about what he believes to be a developing tendency for people to forget themselves in their enquiry into matters of utmost importance, and that furthermore this is as it ought to be according to the science of the day.

Against this tendency, Kierkegaard finds it necessary to make it as difficult as possible for his reader to forget himself in his particular existence. In For Self Examination, for example, he directly admonishes his reader saying "thou shalt read fear and trembling into thy soul, so that by God's help thou shalt succeed in becoming a man, a personality, saved from being this dreadful absurdity into which we men—created in God's image!—have become, changed by evil enchantment, into an impersonal objective something" (67). This concern for existence was alluded to earlier when it was said that the Postscript is equally accessible to all readers for the reason that its subject matter is universal.[52] In an important sense it is a text about existence, and Kierkegaard assumes that all of his readers

exist. Indeed, he thrives on the irony this assumption gives rise to, since he cannot assume that all of his readers will assume this much themselves.

From the story of David and Nathan, Kierkegaard tells us, we should be able to perceive "what a depth of slyness and cunning there is in Christianity when world culture, taking advantage of what is undeniably true, that selfishly to intrude one's own personality, one's ego is vanity, that taking advantage of this they they have made out that to be vanity which in relation to God's Word is just seriousness, so that they may be exempted from seriousness and its strenuous exertion, and just by this means assure themselves of being esteemed as serious and cultured men."[53] It is important that the sort of application being described as a requirement for understanding not be confused with the narcissism epidemic in the present age. Kierkegaard does not have in mind the vanity of he who extracts from the tradition only what he believes to be immediately relevant to him. Application does not mean "What's in it for me?" Rather it should be thought of as opposed to anonymity. Against this tendency to anonymity, Kierkegaard urges that, at least in the reading of religious texts, "thou must say to thyself continually, 'It is I that am addressed, it is about me this is said.'[54] Such application is a requirement for the kind of understanding appropriate to such texts.

What is here described as a requirement for understanding, Climacus describes as the task of becoming subjective. In the Postscript he writes:

> While abstract thought seeks to understand the concrete abstractly, the subjective thinker has conversely to understand the abstract concretely. Abstract thought turns from concrete men to consider man in general; the subjective thinker seeks to understand the abstract determination of being human in terms of this particular existing human being. (315)

What Climacus says applies as well to reading texts, which are, after all, very abstract. It is a limitation of texts that they are necessarily general and cannot address individual readers by name as it were. For this reason it is necessary for a reader to flesh out what is given in texts only in skelatal form with his own experience. If, for example, I were reading a treatise that enumerated typically the various forms of despair under which men live, it would be important to place myself within one of the categories, to ask which form, if any, applied to me. Such work is the task of the reader and cannot be performed by the text.

The significance of application for understanding can be seen with reference to what is involved in understanding the Shadowgraphs written by A., the author of the first volume of Either/Or. These are sketches of typical human possibilities "writ large" and understanding them requires that one flesh them out with one's own history. A. writes:

> For though I have borrowed the names of certain literary characters for purposes of designation, it does not follow that only these fictitious characters pass in review. The names must be regarded as nomina appellativa,

> and I shall not object if one or another of you should feel inclined to choose for a particular picture some other name, a dearer one, perhaps, or one which seems more natural to him. (175)

The name being hinted at here is, or course, the name of the reader, who is the one to whom the sketches properly apply. Most of Kierkegaard's texts remind the reader of the need for application, some more directly directly than others. In Purity of Heart Kierkegaard writes:

> The talk does not address itself to you as if to a particularly designated person, for it does not know who you are. But if you weigh the occasion vigorously, then it will be to you, whoever you may be, it will be as if it spoke precisely to you. This is not due to any merit in the talk. It is the product of your own activity that for your own sake the talk is helpful to you; and it will be because of your own activity that you will be the one to whom the intimate "thou" is spoken. This is your own activity, it really is.[55]

To begin such activity is to begin the task of becoming subjective.

From what has been said we can gather who Kierkegaard's sought after, although not always found, audience is. It is "that individual", a particular reader with a particular history which he brings to bear upon the reading of texts. This is the ideal reader, but by no means the typical. It is the typical reader who is expected; the ideal reader is hoped for. In the next section the relationship between these two sorts of readers will be clarified.

3. Kierkegaard's Two Audiences

> The play's the thing
> Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King. Hamlet[56]

In the previous section two kinds of understanding have been distinguished, an understanding that we all have almost by upbringing as it were, and an understanding that must be worked for, that has certain requirements that must be fulfilled. Where there is a task, however, there is always the possibility that someone will not assume the task. Where there are requirements there is always the possibility that the requirements will not be met. That this possibility exists divides Kierkegaard's audience in two, into two kinds of readers who both "understand" the same text, but, be it noted, in different ways. In Fear and Trembling Johannes De Silentio asks, or perhaps warns:

> To understand/and to understand are therefore two things? Certainly they are; and he who has understood this (but not, be it noted, in the sense of the first understanding) is initiated into all the secret mysteries of irony. It is with this contradiction irony is properly employed.[57]

Irony is a possibility for all texts that admit of being understood in more than one way. It is ironic, for example, that David "understands" what Nathan says to him, yet fails to "understand" its application to him. If a text has two sides, and a reader only perceives the more obvious side, then at the same time the other side mocks him.

The possibility of two different understandings of a text gives rise to the possibility of two different audiences for the same text. Think of how different the play Hamlet stages for Claudius is according to how it is understood. For Claudius and for a member of the court it is

in a sense the same play, and yet understood very differently. Or think about the story of Tarquinius Superbus, which is alluded to on the title page of Fear and Trembling, and of the different ways the messenger and the son "understood" the act of cutting off the heads of the tallest poppies.[58] These texts each address two different audiences. Kierkegaard's texts, and especially the pseudonymous ones, play on the fact that they admit of being understood in two essentially different ways. Kierkegaard does not play upon this irony for the demonic pleasure derived from incestuous conversation with the initiated, or to conceal something from some readers while secretly plotting sinister plans with others. Rather he is interested in initiating the transition from the one understanding to the other. The point is to educate. The relationship between the two audiences is dialectical and not an either/or. The second and more enlightened audience is the first at a later stage of development, not an elite group of gifted individuals. The point of demarcation between the two audiences is not intelligence; it is simply the willingness to allow oneself to be addressed by the text.

Essentially Authority and Revelation has the same dialectic as the story of David and Nathan. The book is "about" Adler only in the same sense that, as far as David is initially concerned, the story Nathan tells him is "about" someone else. The proper understanding of either requires

that the reader recognize himself in the drama, that the reader make the application to his own situation. There is a difference between the two, however, in that Nathan assumes authority and virtually forces David to make the application whereas Kierkegaard, for tactical reasons, leaves this application to his reader to make or to fail to make.[59] If the reader fails to make the application, then he become's victim to the text's irony.

While Kierkegaard does not speak directly in Authority and Revelation, as Nathan does, he nevertheless makes it virtually impossible to miss the clues he carefully leaves. His reference to Magister Adler as a mirror for the present age is particularly obvious. Any schoolboy knows, after all, that Kierkegaard has no interest in "the present age" as such, which he views as a monstrous abstraction of the same species as "the public". He is concerned with "the present age" only insofar as this concept functions heuristically to characterize what is typical of his assumed readers. The point of the text is for the reader to see himself (and not"the present age") in the mirror. In For Self-Examination Kierkegaard asks "What is required in order to derive true benediction from beholding oneself in the mirror of the word?"[60] He answers, "First of all, what is required is, that thou must not look at the mirror, not behold the mirror, but must see thyself in the mirror."[61] To look at the image and study it disinterestedly, to think about Magister Adler as some kind of historical

curiosity, would be to miss the point. The essential thing is what the mirror reflects; not the reflection but the being, the existent. Such a text is like a pointing finger; one misses the point when one directs one's attention upon the finger instead of the thing being pointed to.

This same metaphor of the mirror which has been evoked to elucidate the nature of understanding also intersects an avenue from which we can return smoothly to the subject of upbringing with which this chapter began. Earlier it was shown how people mirror their upbringing as an imprint mirrors the stamp which shapes it. Adler mirrors the present age in that he is its product, its image as it were. He mirrors the kind of understanding that is typical of people who have been brought up in the present age. He is essentially comical, however, for the reason that he does not see himself in the mirror. He reproduces the present age and its "understanding" of religious language, yet he does not understand himself in his various reproductions, does not deliberately will them. He is an example of how people living in the present age understand, or misunderstand, religious language, but does not understand himself as being such an example.

From Adler we can learn what the task requisite for understanding is, although he cannot himself teach us this, as has been said. Often in connection with the task of coming to understand one hears formulas such as "look into

yourself" and "turn your vision inward". As is the case with all such formulas, there is good reason to be suspicious as to what is really being said. Such performative statements are meaningless if taken to refer to some barely accessible region of the human psyche. No, one can look at oneself only by looking in the mirror; one cannot do away with the mirror. One acheives the sort of understanding Kierkegaard hopes to bring about when one beholds oneself in the mirror the texts of our tradition holds up to us, not by solipsistically "looking into oneself", whatever that could possibly mean. This is the point behind the Shadowgraphs in Either/Or. A. writes:

> I call these sketches Shadowgraphs, partly by the designation to remind you at once that they derive from the darker side of life, partly because like other shadowgraphs they are not directly visible. When I take a shadowgraph in my hand, it makes no impression upon me, and gives me no clear conception of it. Only when I hold it up opposite the wall, and now look not directly at it, but at that which appears on the wall, am I able to see it. So also with the picture which I wish to show here, an inward picture which does not become perceptible until I see it through the external. This external is perhaps quite unobtrusive but not until I look through it, do I discover that inner picture which I desire to show you, an inner picture too delicately drawn to be outwardly visible, woven as it is of the tenderest moods of the soul. (Vol. I, 171)

There is no direct access to self-understanding.

The transition from out of Kierkegaard's first audience and into his second mirrors the transition from understanding to understanding proper. This transition passes through the double meaning of religious language. Such double meaning is not just two definitions of the same

concept, rather it is the same definition understood in two very different ways. The first understanding, the childish understanding of Christian concepts we immediately receive in virtue of the fact that we are brought up in a community where such concepts are in widespread circulation, lacks a sense of the existential referent which gives these concepts their meaning. Kierkegaard's contribution to the philosophy of religion is not that he gives us new definitions of Christian concepts. From his point of view, the problem lies not with the old definitions, but rather with how these definitions are understood. Mere rote-learning of definitions is not enough for understanding, although it is indeed a prerequisite. Beyond this basic prerequisite there are certain requirements. The individual is required to flesh out the concepts with reference to his own particular situation, weave them into the fabric of his own personal history. Coming to understand these concepts requires that the individual work and reflect upon the first understanding he has passively inherited. This involves the recognition, somewhere along the way, that the first understanding is in fact a misunderstanding, albeit a necessary one.

Kierkegaard describes the experience of coming to understand the double meaning of religious language as "an awakening".[62] David is as one who is asleep as he listens disinterestedly to Nathan telling his story. His recognition that the story has an application to his own particular

situation is an awakening of sorts. Such awakening is the revelation of another side of things behind that which is immediately apparent. The experience of awakening is appropriate to religious language because such language is not literal and never simply means what it immediately appears to mean. In Works of Love Kierkegaard writes:

> All human language about the spiritual, yes, even the divine language of Holy Scriptures, is essentially transferred or metaphorical language. This is quite in order or corresponds to the order of things and of existence, since even though man is spirit from the moment of birth he first becomes conscious as spirit later, and therefore prior to this he has lived for a certain time within sensuous-psychic categories. The first portion of life shall not, however, be cast aside when the spirit awakens, any more than the awakening of spirit announces itself in sensuous of sensuous-psychic modes in contrast to the sensuous or sensuous-psychic. The first portion is taken over by spirit, and, thus used, thus laid at the base, it becomes transferred. Therefore the spiritual man and the sensuous-psychic man say the same thing in a sense, and yet there remains an infinite difference between what they say, since the latter does not suspect the secret of transferred language, even though he uses the same words, but not metaphorically. There is a world of difference between the two; the one has made a transition or has let himself be led over to the other side; whereas the other has remained on this side. Yet there is something binding which they have in common—they both use the same language.[83]

There is indeed a world of difference between someone who says something while dreaming and someone who says something while awake. This difference, however, often goes unnoticed owing to the deceptiveness made possible by the fact that both may say the same thing. This is why it can be a difficult matter to distinguish between the two.

If each kind of understanding had its own set of words, its own language, the two could easily be distinguished.

The difference would be immediately apparent and could be recognized by those on either side at a glance. Kierkegaard stresses, however, that there is no direct or immediate sign in terms of which these two kinds of understanding could be distinguished. In the same passage quoted above he continues:

> One in whom the spirit is awakened does not therefore leave the visible world. Although now conscious of himself as spirit, he is still continually in the world of the visible and is himself sensuously visible; likewise he also remains in the language, except that it is transferred. Transferred language is, then, not a brand new language; it is rather the language already at hand. Just as spirit is invisible, so also is its language a secret, and the secret rests precisely in this that it uses the same language as the simple man and the child but uses it as transferred....The distinction is by no means directly apparent. Therefore we quite rightly regard emphasis upon a directly apparent distinction as a sign of false spirituality—which is mere sensuousness; whereas the presence of spirit is the quiet, whispering secret of transferred language—audible to him who has an ear to hear.(199-200)

There is no royal seal by which one who understands can be recognized in his authority, no birthmark or secret password. The mark of understanding is as it were invisible, and this subtlety gives rise to the confusion of the present age, a faithless age waiting lazily for a direct sign.

What has been said in this chapter about the confusion of two kinds of understanding and the importance of separating them has implications which bear upon understanding, or misunderstanding, the purpose of Kierkegaard's authorship. Hopefully this detour has been something more than an objective account of Kierkegaard's

"theory of understanding" because, after all, Kierkegaard's remarks apply as well to understanding and misunderstanding his own texts, as he is always playfully aware. If his reader is even slightly attentive, he is bound to ask himself, at some point or other in his reading, on which side of the confusion he stands. If he judges himself to be exempt from this confusion, there is only one way he could have become so: by having passed through the confusion. To lose sight of this application is to risk falling into confusion.

The following text quoted from the Journals, titled "My Thesis", gives us further insight into the purpose behind Kierkegaard's authorship:

> My thesis is not that the substance of what is proclaimed in Christendom as Christianity is not Christianity. No, my thesis is that the proclamation is not Christianity. I am fighting about a how, a reduplication. It is self-evident that without reduplication Christianity is not Christianity. (X^3 A431)

It is important to note that Kierkegaard does not fault the language Christianity uses, but rather how the language is used. He is aware of the possibility that such language, like all language, is subject to abuse and misunderstanding. He recognizes, probably more profoundly than any of Christianity's major critics, the confusion and illusion surrounding the use of Christian language. Unlike some of the critics of Christianity, however, he does not argue from the confusion to the abandonment of the language which lends itself to the confusion. In another entry he writes:

> In the relation between an established order and the new within Christianity, the rule is quite simply this; the new is not a new what but a new how of the old what.
>
> Yet serving a how cannot very easily become conspicuous or satisfy earthly passions which want to displace the old so that they themselves can rule, etc.: therefore for all impatient and secularly minded people it is important that the new becomes a what so that light can properly fall upon—the originators.(X[3]A593)

For Kierkegaard, the solution to the misuse of religious language is not the invention of a new language to replace the old one, or the creation of new metaphors because the old ones have become lifeless and devoid of meaning. In time this new language would itself become trivialized, and the new metaphors would become stale and have to be discarded, and so on.

On Kierkegaard's understanding, the misunderstanding to which religious language is subject is a necessary stage on the way to understanding, just as despair or sin necessarily precedes faith, as expressed in the doctrine of the fortunate fall. A childish understanding of Christianity is a necessary stage on life's way because, after all, we are children before we are adults. Rather than working toward creating a new breed of children, Kierkegaard contrives his authorship to facilitate passage through this stage; to assist his reader in moving from understanding to understanding. His point in prompting his reader to this transition is quite Socratic: to get his reader to turn his concernful attention back upon that which he already understands, but be it noted, in such a way that he

misunderstands. His purpose is to induce his reader to reflect upon "how" he understands what he understands, not to introduce a new "what", a new doctrine. In the next chapter, Kierkegaard's strategy in contriving to introduce this new "how" into a situation of confusion will be discussed. Reference will be made to the need for the form of a communication to be tailored to suit the supposed situation of an intended audience.

III

KIERKEGAARD'S ART: THE RHETORIC OF INDIRECT COMMUNICATION

> Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature:for any thing so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.
>
> Hamlet[1]

In the last chapter it was shown that Kierkegaard has very definite views on human understanding and misunderstanding. Considerable care was devoted to elucidating these views because understanding or misunderstanding them is of paramount importance for understanding or misunderstanding the purpose of Kierkegaard's authorship. This importance is due to the fact that he is primarily an educator. He understands his task as being that of bringing his reader to understanding. The awareness that this is his purpose, and a precise understanding of what requirements are necessary for the fulfillment of that purpose, brings Kierkegaard's authorship into its proper perspective. This is because Kierkegaard tailors the form or style of his communication to suit the purpose toward which he directs his concern. His views on understanding and misunderstanding very much shape the form or style he adopts as being most appropriate for the task of correcting misunderstanding and bringing someone to understanding.

Of course Kierkegaard is quite definite about what he

thinks it is important to understand. He does not worship understanding for the sake of understanding. The subject matter he deems most in need of being understood is Christianity. One of the major reasons he thinks an understanding of Christianity is wanting is that a misunderstanding of Christianity is so prevalent. The prevalence of this misunderstanding is an important consideration for Kierkegaard in contriving a pedagogy for the purpose of educating people to an understanding of Christianity. If such understanding is to be brought about, then the misunderstanding must be removed. This is the necessary beginning of a Christian education. Indirect communication serves a number of purposes in Kierkegaard's authorship, one of the most important being the removal of the prevailing misunderstanding of Christianity.

While Kierkegaard assumes an active part in the removal of the misunderstanding concerning Christianity, the person existing within this misunderstanding cannot remain passive. Something quite specific is required of him. A misunderstanding is removed only when the person recognizes that he has misunderstood. Indirect communication facilitates this recognition, but the act of recognition itself is the work of the person who misunderstands. Even if everyone else in the world recognized someone else's misunderstanding, it would not be removed until he himself recognized (or perhaps, admitted) it.

In this chapter, through an examination of direct communication and its inadequacies as a rhetorical device for Christian education, an attempt will be made to persuade the reader that indirect communication is strikingly appropriate for the purpose Kierkegaard hopes to accomplish by means of his authorship. Indirect communication is itself a rhetorical device because it has, in the distance, the telos of persuading those for whose benefit it is employed that Christianity is vitally important. Simply stated, Kierkegaard hopes to persuade his reader to become a Christian. The words "persuade", "become", and "Christian", bear much weight in this context and are prone to being misunderstood. There is a way of "persuading" someone to become a Christian which lends itself to being confused with the sort of persuasion indirect communication employs. There is a way of "becoming" a Christian which lends itself to being confused with the way Kierkegaard hopes his reader will become a Christian. There is a sort of "Christian" who is commonly confused with the sort of Christian who is the telos of indirect communication.

The Point of Departure for Indirect Communication

> If real success is to attend the effort to bring a man to a definite position, one must first of all take pains to find him where he is and begin there. Point of View [2]

Instead of beginning immediately with an exposition of indirect communication, it is perhaps more appropriate to let it emerge naturally through a consideration of the sorts

of reasons that lead Kierkegaard to reject direct communication. There is good reason for a discussion of indirect communication to proceed cautiously. In a journal entry, Kierkegaard writes that "the basic error of modern times is that everywhere people are occupied with the what they are to communicate—not with what communication is."[3] Failure to reflect upon what communication is can result in misunderstanding, and in some instances bring about an effect opposite to that intended.

In a section of Concluding Unscientific Postscript entitled "The subjective existing thinker has regard to the dialectics of the process of communication" Climacus writes:

> Ordinary communication between man and man is wholly immediate, because men in general exist immediately. When one man sets forth something and another acknowledges the same, word for word, it is taken for granted that they are in agreement, and that they have understood one another. (69)

Direct communication, here referred to as "ordinary communication", is premised upon a shared assumption between speaker and audience as to the meaning of the words being used. The speaker assumes that his audience understands the same thing that he intends by each word and the audience assumes that they are understanding the words in the same way they are intended. This assumption is generally well-founded in situations where speaker and audience share a common upbringing. Each immediately takes the words to mean what he has been brought up to understand by them. The common upbringing justifies the assumption of a commonality of

meaning. Climacus tells us that "a direct form of communication is based upon the security of social continuity"(76).

There are many matters about which men communicate for which direct communication is quite appropriate. For many matters the understanding arrived at through upbringing is sufficient, and as long as speaker and audience share a common upbringing communication about them will proceed smoothly. Such understanding is not, however, sufficient for matters spoken of in religious language. A direct or immediate understanding of them, as is acquired through upbringing, is a misunderstanding. Understanding the language of Christianity is dialectical, it requires that one come to recognize that in the first instance one misunderstands. It requires that one leave behind the conversational norms surrounding the widespread use of this language and thereby exclude oneself from the misunderstanding.

Unlike direct communication, indirect communication is based upon a supposed discontinuity between the understandings of speaker and audience. It takes into consideration the dialectical process involved in understanding proper and the possibility that an audience might be involved in a misunderstanding. In the event that an audience misunderstood a subject matter, for a speaker to address them directly about it would only bolster the misunderstanding. The problem with direct communication is that it fails to

take into consideration the negative, the possibility of misunderstanding. In the Postscript Climacus explains:

> So it is always in the case of the negative: where it is unconsciously present it transforms positivity into negativity. Here it transforms a supposed communication into an illusion, because the negative factor in the communication is not reflected upon, but the communication is conceived simply and solely as positive. (70)

For someone to speak directly about his faith to a cynic would be to risk feeding the cynic's misunderstanding. It would indicate that the person had failed to take into account the discontinuity between his and the cynic's understanding of the same words. The cynic would simply translate his words into his own misunderstanding.

If one is to speak thoughtfully about religious matters, matters that require the very specific kind of understanding that has been described, then it is necessary to take into consideration the presuppositions of one's audience and tailor the form of one's communication accordingly. Such artful speech would be carefully and deliberately composed because, as Climacus tells us in the Postscript, "artistry would always demand a reflection within the recipient, and an awareness of the form of the communication in relation to the recipient's possible misunderstanding"(70). Mastery of such artistry is a prerequisite for one who dares to assume the role of teacher. It is especially necessary for a teacher to reflect upon considerations such as "how the dialectic of instruction must be determined with relation to the learner's presuppositions; whether these presuppositions

are not so essential that the instruction becomes a deception in case one is not at once aware of them, and in that event the instruction is transformed into non-instruction."[5]

If one's audience has no presuppositions about one's subject matter, it is quite appropriate to state immediately what it is one wishes to communicate. If, however, one's audience initially presupposes a certain "what", and if the "what" is a misunderstanding, then the first thing to do is remove the misunderstanding. The dialectic of communication requires that a misunderstanding first be removed in order to facilitate communication of a proper understanding. This applies to the situation Kierkegaard finds himself in as someone concerned to speak about Christianity in Christendom. In Attack Upon Christendom he writes:

> When Christianity came into the world the task was simply to proclaim Christianity. The same is the case wherever Christianity is introduced into a country the religion of which is not Christianity.
>
> In "Christendom" the situation is a different one. What we have before us is not Christianity but a prodigious illusion, and the people are not pagans but live in the blissful conceit that they are Christians. So if in this situation Christianity is to be introduced, first of all the illusion must be disposed of. But since this vain conceit, this illusion, is to the effect that they are Christians, it looks indeed as if introducing Christianity were taking Christianity away from men. Nevertheless this is the first thing to do, the illusion must go.

In such a situation it would only lead to "non-instruction" if one were to begin immediately with what one wished to communicate. It would be appropriate to postpone arrival at this destination until one had completed a detour passing through the misunderstanding. This detour is what Climacus

is referring to in the Postscript where he writes that "it is discovered that a new beginning is necessary, the beginning upon the immense detour of dying from immediacy."[7] The experience of "dying from immediacy" involves leaving behind the understanding of Christian language one has acquired simply as a result of one's upbringing. This first understanding must first be negated in order to facilitate the emergence of a more mature understanding.

The teacher's part in the negation of the first understanding, which is in fact a misunderstanding, consists in the effort to solicit the necessary reflection from the learner. This involves getting him to question things previously taken for granted, to become attentive to possibilities previously overlooked, and eventually to recognize a misunderstanding which has previously been confused for understanding. Kierkegaard writes:

> Reflections do not presuppose the qualifying concepts as given and understood; therefore, they must not so much move, mollify, reassure, persuade, as awaken and provoke men to sharpen thought.... Reflections ought to be a "gadfly".[8]

The reference to a "gadfly" suggests the figure of Socrates who described himself as such, stinging the people of Athens with questions carefully aimed so as to waken them to reflect upon opinions previously held uncritically. He tried to throw them back upon their unexamined presuppositions. Finding that people tended to begin immediately with the highest and most important things, Socrates found it necessary to redirect their attention back toward what is

simple and first in the order of knowing. Like mirrors, his questions turned people back upon themselves.

As the trial and subsequent execution of Socrates dramatically demonstrated, the project of getting people to reflect upon matters of which an immediate understanding is already assumed can be very risky. It seems to be a brute fact of human psychology that we do not like to recognize, and even more so, admit, error. There are, however, a number of important reasons besides the obvious one of self-preservation as to why it might be counter-productive for someone to attempt to generate reflection upon a misunderstanding simply by telling a person that he has misunderstood. The person might, for instance, become defensive and quickly deny the accusation without even stopping to reflect upon what was charged and whether or not it were true. The person might immunize himself against criticism by finding, or perhaps manufacturing, some reason to doubt the authority of the person doing the accusing. Or perhaps the person might accept the charge that he has misunderstood, but not as a consequence of his own recognition, but out of insecurity or self-doubt. Psychological considerations of this sort could be important factors in a decision to proceed indirectly when dealing with a misunderstanding.

In order to avert such possibilities, and for the sake of insuring that the person within a misunderstanding recognizes it for himself, a teacher may find it necessary

to resort to deception, perhaps concealing the purpose of his communication until the moment was propitious for its revelation. Such deception is present to a certain extent in Authority and Revelation. Discussing the indirectness of this text Kierkegaard writes of Adler:

> his life is an admonition for many, or may be; for in fact he was a Christian of sorts, as all men are Christians, he was confirmed, became a theological candidate, a Christian priest in geographical Christendom—and yet the catastrophe revealed how his being a Christian is to be understood. Here it is an occurrence which is the admonition, and also the admonition is indirect, it depends upon the individual whether he for himself will allow himself to be admonished; it is not as when a religiously exalted person thunders and condemns, which so easily may exasperate men instead of profiting them. (188-9)

The indirectness stems from the fact that while it appears that the subject of the text is one thing, i.e. Adler, at the same time another subject is being addressed, i.e. the reader. This form of dramatic irony is identical to that which is present in the play Hamlet stages for the benefit of Claudius.

It is fruitful to compare Socrates and Kierkegaard with respect to the employment of irony, since admittedly Socrates is Kierkegaard's mentor in this art. In Authority and Revelation Kierkegaard writes:

> Irony makes the phenomenon evident; irony consists in the cunning that, while the opponent believes he is talking about another thing or even has grasped another thing, irony perceives that the individual has given himself away.... The ironical cunning consists in transforming oneself to nothing by negative-active consistency in order to help the phenomenon to become manifest. At the first glance and for stupid men it may seem as if the ironical man were the loser. The ironical cunning

> consists in keeping oneself negative, thus transforming the attack into self-revelation. The attacker raises a storm and makes a great fuss; in the eyes of foolish men it seems as though he were the stronger, and yet he accomplishes nothing more—and there sits irony so cunning and on the lookout—he accomplishes nothing more than to reveal his own nature, his own paltriness or his own insignificance. (125)

Kierkegaard keeps himself "negative" by revoking his own authority. His qualifying motto "without authority" is analagous to Socrates' feigned ignorance. The irony of Socrates consists in the fact that he is not merely talking about what he immediately appears to be talking about. In professing ignorance, he is really talking about the ignorance of the person with whom he is engaged. He indirectly mirrors his audience. In the Postscript Climacus tells us that "If an indirect relationship is assumed, the discourse will become a monologue, but a monologue about the speaker's own experience and its specific mode through which, though speaking about himself, he indirectly speaks also of the listener" (375).

Kierkegaard's employment of irony and indirect communication is occasioned by circumstances similar to those which precipitated Socrates' cunning artistry. Consider the following account of his situation and task quoted from the Journals:

> It is the concept of "Christendom" which must be reformed; what has to be done is the dialectical opposite of introducing Christianity and yet in another sense rather similar; to introduce Christianity into Christendom. The illusion that all are Christians has reached its peak—well then, there can be no talk about introducing Christianity—therefore examination in

> Christianity is required; through a presentation of Christianity a test must be made of what is really meant by saying that we are all Christians. This is analagous to Socratic questioning. Just as he began with the Sophists, who claimed to be Christians sic, so we begin here with the claims of those who say they are Christians. And just as he was the ignorant one, so the examiner here must be someone who says that he is not himself a Christian. And just as the fruit of Socratic questioning was a sharper definition of knowledge, the fruit here is a sharper definition of what it is to be a Christian. (X² A135)

The need for another Socrates to examine Christendom is met with the appearance of sundry authors bearing queer names such a "Johannes De Silentio" and "Johannes Climacus". The works of these two will receive brief consideration here.

The authorship of Philosophical Fragments and Concluding Unscientific Postscript is ascribed to a certain Johannes Climacus. These texts, respectively, are continuing investigations of the same theme. In one way or other they are both concerned with the significance Christianity has for someone living in Christendom, and especially someone who confers great value on philosophy as being the eye of the needle through which Christianity must pass. In the Postscript Climacus confides with his reader that Philosophical Fragments was artfully tailored to suit a certain kind of audience. Answering reviews that his first book received, he writes:

> And yet the book is so far from being written for the uninformed, to give them something to know, that the one I introduce into the book as my interlocutor is precisely a well-informed person, which seems to indicate that the book is written for informed readers whose misfortune is that they know too much. 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. This seems very strange and ironical, and yet I believe that I have succeeded in expressing precisely what I mean. 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? (245)

Consideration given to the kind of understanding most appropriate for a subject matter such as Christianity, and to the prevailing misunderstanding, "the art of taking away", the Socratic art proper, is necessarily prior to the art of delivering dogma. This is why the author of Philosophical Fragments and the Postscript is not someone who claims to be a Christian, someone who would begin immediately with the "what" of Christian dogma. Instead he is someone who claims that he is not a Christian, presenting Christianity at a distance in its idealty.

In accentuating the distance between himself and Christianity, Climacus providentially serves a task alluded to in a number of journal entries, such as the following:

> My task has continuously been to provide the existential-corrective by poetically presenting the ideals and inciting people about the established order. (X A15)

In its full implications, Kierkegaard's task is to introduce the task of becoming a Christian into Christendom. Any task

presumes a point of departure and a destination. Imagine someone under the delusion that he has arrived at his destination when in fact he was moving on the spot at the point of departure. Then it would be necessary to stress, perhaps even exaggerate, the distance, the task. It is because some such situation exists in Christendom that Climacus presents Christianity as a remote possibility, as something distant from actuality. In Philosophical Fragments, Christianity is presented in an idealized form such that it is but remotely familiar to a hypothetical reader who is given a voice in the text. This reader interrupts periodically with comments such as "This poem of yours is the most wretched piece of plagiarism ever perpetrated, for it is neither more nor less than what every child knows" (43). Ironically, the hypothetical reader unwittingly states the very problem that Climacus is trying to accentuate. Indeed, everyone "knows" what Christianity is, but how do they "know" it— like the schoolboy who knows it by rote? Climacus, concerned to distinguished between understanding and understanding proper, wants to make the point that the Christianity so familiar to the schoolboy is not Christianity proper, but only the point of departure for it.

The misunderstanding that Climacus has to contend with is that two things which are really different have become confused. Christianity has been collapsed into Christendom, the destination into the point of departure.

Therefore Climacus, being Socratic, speaks from the point of departure, looking into the distance at a destination which is a task and not a given. In the introduction to the Postscript he explains his manner of proceeding:

> To put it as simply as possible, using myself by way of illustration: I, Johannes Climacus, born in this city and now thirty years old, a common ordinary human being like most people, assume that there awaits me a highest good, an eternal happiness, in the same sense that such a good awaits a servant-girl or a professor. I have heard that Christianity proposes itself as a condition for the acquirement of this good, and now I ask how I may establish a proper relation to this doctrine. (19)

In the manner of Socrates, he transforms himself into the negative and is apparently at a disadvantage since he, a mature adult, does not even know what every schoolboy knows. As in Socratic communication, when he says, "I, Johannes Climacus", he is indirectly mirroring the reader. This is hinted at in his emphasis that he is "a common ordinary human being like most people." The telos of his text is the reader's recognition of himself in the mirror he holds up, and this recognition is made easier since the grounds for identification are close to home. Paul Holmer points out that "The pseudonymous works erected ideal authors who designed in turn a series of mirrorlike positions in which the reader sees himself reflected."[9]

It is fruitful, at least in the case of Climacus and De Silentio, to think about the pseudonyms in terms of what it means to begin with the beginning. They begin at the most primitive level, representing the point of departure for the dialectical process in which one becomes a Christian. They

mark the terminus a quo, not the terminus ad quem. The misunderstanding they are intended to prompt recognition of has its basis in the tendency people have to move directly to the terminus ad quem, or what is the same thing, they do not move at all because they are under the illusion that they have already arrived. To turn this inertia around, or perhaps back upon itself, the pseudonyms appear upon the reader's horizon as a detour which must be passed through. They emphasize, and even exaggerate, the negative—sin, despair, suffering, and so on. They find the reader where he is and provide a ladder from the terminus a quo to the terminus ad quem. This is cryptically intimated by the name "Johannes Climacus", "John the Climber". The emphasis is on the task, the climb.

Fear and Trembling is an exploration of the concept of faith, not from the standpoint of one who has arrived, but from the standpoint of one looking at it in the distance raising the question of what work must be done in order to move toward it. De Silentio says "For my part I can well describe the movements of faith, but I cannot make them."[10]

The ladder De Silentio sets out for the reader is infinite resignation. Resignation is a surrendering or letting go of our immediate attachments to things and people. The qualification "infinite" means that the resignation is applied to all possible things and not just selected particulars. It is important that infinite resignation be

emphasized because it is the first movement of faith, and because it is commonly skipped or overlooked.

De Silentio illustrates the movement of infinite resignation through a detailed analysis of the story of Abraham and Issac. Issac symbolizes Abraham's attachments to things and people; he is the best of all that Abraham values. Abraham severs this attachment, performs the movement of infinite resignation, in his willingness to sacrifice Issac. He resigns himself to the possibility of losing Issac forever. The severance is not, however, a literal one. He does not actually kill Issac. Resignation does not require a literal withdrawal from things of this world. This would be monasticism, a near literal interpretation of Christianity which Kierkegaard respects but ultimately rejects. Rather resignation should be thought of as an acceptance of the gratuitousness of all that we value. The problem with our immediate attachments to things is that we tend to take the things for granted. Our relationship to them is not mediated by the resigning thought that in the twinkling of an eye the most precious things we value could be taken from us forever. Resignation distances and detaches us from our attachments. Metaphorically speaking, it is a"dying from immediacy". One would be a swindler, however, if one only went half-way along the path of resignation and held back from the detachment with the constraining thought that, after all, the act of detachment is only metaphorical,

Abraham gets Issac back in the end. De Silentio warns that "If people fancy that by considering the outcome of this story they might let themselves be moved to believe, they deceive themselves and want to swindle God out of the first movement of faith, the infinite resignation."[11] Certainly Abraham gets everything back in the end, but to jump immediately to the conclusion is to miss the point of the story altogether.

De Silentio is a master at ferreting out swindles and deceptions. He is witness to a tendency in the present age for people to confuse their immediate attachments to things with faith. The intensity with which the immediate attachment is sustained is commonly mistaken as being a gauge by which to measure faith. Immediate certainty is confused with faith. De Silentio believes that faith is indeed a certainty, but a certainty distinguishable from the certainty of immediacy in that it presupposes resignation, the recognition of uncertainty. He is careful to point out that "Faith therefore is not an aesthetic emotion but something far higher, precisely because it has resignation as its presupposition; it is not an immediate instinct of the heart, but is the paradox of life and existence."[12] Thought of in this way, infinite resignation is an intermediary stage between immediate certainty and faith. De Silentio tells us that ours is an age "which has attained an unparalleled proficiency in forgery and does the highest

things by leaping over the intermediate steps."[13]

In order to emphasize and even exagerate the intermediate steps, De Silentio begins with the beginning, with the first thing that must be done toward the attainment of faith. Here the emphasis is on what an individual must do, or perhaps stop doing, if faith is to present itself to him as a possibility. The emphasis is on what Kierkegaard calls the principle of works:

> the principle of works begins with the beginning, and begins with what is common to us men; the principle of faith begins so far ahead that there are not many in any generation who come so far—therefore this principle must become completely meaningless if one wants to begin at once with it.
>
> The principle of works begins with the beginning and with what is generally true—namely, that we ought to be treated as beginners—yes, it is even to our advantage.(Journals, XI[2] A301)

Thus it is that the point of departure for faith and the point of departure for indirect communication are one and the same. It is because the way to faith is indirect that the form of communication best suited to sending someone on this way is also indirect.

Seduction or Decision? A Choice for Christian Orators

> They say, for example, that there are two ways—the way of desire and the way of virtue—they describe the first as strewn with flowers, etc.; the other as rigorous in the beginning, but little by little...here the preacher suddenly forgets himself and virtue's narrow way, for his description by virtue's way little by little becomes seductive. What then? The result is that a sensualist is not only crazy for not choosing the way of virtue, but that he is a crazy sensualist for not choosing the way of virtue—if it is as the preacher says. (Journals, VI A149)

Reflect for a moment upon the following thesis: In the present age there are powerful forces operating in hidden ways to persuade large numbers of people to act toward their preferred ends, but, be it noted, in such a way that the people concerned are not aware that or how they are being persuaded. The force behind the persuasion is hidden or concealed. The level at which the persuasion occurs is below the level of consciousness. That the machinery behind this kind of persuasion is hidden is not merely incidental to it, but rather is the condition for its efficacy.

If one knows something about the nature of rats, about the sorts of things they like and dislike, one can, with very little effort, train a rat to travel along a predetermined path toward a predetermined end. The rat, of course, can have no awareness of the fact that there is an intelligence directing its movements from without. While there are some important differences between the behaviour of rats and the behaviour of people, there are also some important similarities. One who knows something about the nature of human beings, about the sorts of things they like and dislike, can, with very little effort, steer people toward predetermined ends in such a way that they are not aware that they are being so directed. Unflattering as this may be, it seems that, judging from the success of Madison Avenue manipulators, we have this much in common with rats.

Of course the differences are even more important. As rats apparently cannot, human beings can and sometimes do direct their movements according to consciously entertained purposes. Human behaviour is not only caused, it is also motivated.

It may very well be that the use of the term "persuasion" to speak about engineering the behaviour of rats and of people insofar as they admit of being so engineered is a semantic impropriety. A good case could be made to support the view that the term "persuasion", properly understood, is applicable only where the person being persuaded is aware that and how he is being persuaded. This much is implicit in a useful distinction Paul Ricoeur makes between a cause and a motive.[14] According to his account of human behaviour and human action, humans are susceptible to both causes and motives. When the relevant conditions proximate to a given are unconscious, or perhaps simply not conscious, they are properly described as causes. This applies, of course, to situations where they are hidden or concealed. To speak about persuasion in describing this situation would be a category mistake. When the relevant conditions proximate to a given behaviour are conscious and reflected upon, they are properly described as motives. In this situation the resulting behaviour would properly be described as an action and to say that someone was persuaded to act in one way rather than another would mean that motives

were suggested to him by someone else. Normally a "twitch" would be caused whereas a "wink" would be motivated.

There are difficulties with this terminology, which is fitting given that the area of human experience it is meant to describe is complex and ambiguous. Sometimes, for example, we are unclear about our motives, sometimes they are vague and ambiguous. Then there is the difficult case of self-deception where the motive we consciously entertain is not the real motive, or perhaps not the real cause. There seems to be a grey area between motive and cause which eludes and perhaps even defies the border that marks this distinction. Perhaps the metaphor of a continuum does most justice to the ambiguity of human experience. Imagine a continuum with cause and decision at opposite ends and an ascending scale along it calibrated with increased consciousness of the proximate conditions for action as the measure. Whatever conceptual language one adopts for understanding man's susceptibility to influence, one thing at least is certain: there are two essentially different and opposed ways by which a human being can be steered toward a given course of action. Whether or not a disservice has been done to the word "persuasion", it has come to be used to describe both.

Just as there are two essentially different ways by which someone can be "persuaded" toward a given action, so too there are two essentially different ways by which

someone can be persuaded to adopt a belief or a set of beliefs. At the one extreme, there is the process of upbringing by which a given individual, virtually by accident, acquires a certain set of beliefs. At the other extreme there is the process of suggesting and clarifying options by which a given individual, on his own authority, is left to himself to decide what he will and will not believe based on his understanding of what is involved. Most instances of persuasion are somewhere in between these two extremes.

In the Postscript Climacus raises a question which brings into perspective the two kinds of persuasion outlined above. He asks:

> Is it permissible, for example, as we say, to win a man for the truth? If he who has any truth to communicate also has some persuasive art, some knowledge of the human heart, some subtlety in catching unawares, some calculating foresight in catching men slowly, is it permissible for him to use this in order to gain adherents for the truth? Or ought he not rather...use these gifts precisely to prevent the establishment of a direct relationship? (233)

This question is extremely important when the truth to be communicated is Christian dogma. If one is to understand Kierkegaard's authorship, it is imperative that one have a concrete understanding of these two options.

In earlier chapters two kinds of Christians were distinguished and two ways of understanding the language of Christianity. For the most part attention was focused upon the person who was a Christian of one or the other kind, and

that person's relationship to the truth he professed: how he understood or misunderstood it. Here the focus of attention will be shifted somewhat. Instead of attending to the subject, the focus will be shifted to the person who is seeking to persuade the subject to adopt a given truth, and the means at his disposal for achieving this end. There are, as we have heard from Climacus, essentially two options, although each contains a great deal of variety within it.

Clarity is best achieved by beginning with the option Climacus speaks of as "winning people for the truth", briefly setting this into a historical perspective. Earlier the process of upbringing was discussed as being the means by which a given individual, and indeed culture, are nurtured into a set of beliefs. At least in the very beginning of our culture, there was not in fact a single person or group of persons who were deliberately directing this process toward predetermined ends. Each generation passed down to the next the beliefs it had acquired from the foregoing without there being a first generation which initially set out to direct the entire process in the tradition. The transmission of beliefs in our tradition has been understood and described as being the work of providence.[15]

Gradually, and especially with the codification of beliefs in written texts, individuals assumed a willful role in this process. Increased consciousness and understanding of the process of upbringing made it possible for individuals to deliberately direct this process in such a

way as to nurture those within their sphere of influence to adopt predetermined beliefs. Plato's Republic is an excellent example of this. Observing the authoritative influence the poets had over people in politics and ethics, he realized that if one could control the poets one could thereby direct the process of upbringing.

This project is carried out as a thought experiment in the first few books of the Republic where Plato outlines a primary education. Its workings are quite complex, but essentially are laid bare in an important passage from the Republic which Kierkegaard quotes to illustrate the same point:

> "When they meet together, and the world sets down at an assembly, or in a court of law, or a theatre, or a camp, or in any other popular resort, and there is a great uproar and they praise some things which are being said or done, and blame other things, equally exaggerating both, shouting and clapping their hands, and the echo of the rocks and the place in which they are assembled redoubles the sound of the praise or blame—at such a time will not a young man's heart, as they say, leap within him."[16]

Because human psychology is such that we desire praise and avoid blame, we are naturally led to imitate models held up to us as being praiseworthy and avoid imitating models deemed blameworthy. By controlling the models available to the young, one could control their upbringing. Perhaps the first systematic exposition of praise and blame and their effectiveness as means for shaping character is Aristotle's Rhetoric. In this book, which we know from the Journals Kierkegaard studied ponderously, Aristotle discusses various ways by which an orator, by carefully praising and

blaming, can win someone to his side.[17] Rhetoric is, of course, "the persuasive art" Climacus was referring to in the passage quoted earlier from the Postscript in which two essential options for orators were juxtaposed.

In the Postscript Climacus writes:

> no direct or immediate transition to Christianity exists. All who in this manner propose to give the individual a rhetorical push into Christianity, or perhaps even to help him by administering a beating, all these are deceivers—nay, they know not what they do.(47)

A "direct or immediate transition to Christianity" would be one lacking the mediation of personal appropriation and decision. One who would "push" someone into Christianity in this way, through the back door, so to speak, would only be concerned with getting the person to adopt his "what" without regard for how it was understood. The persuasion would be designed in such a way as to make it appear as if a decision were not necessary. The transition to the "what" would be something that happened to the person from without as if by accident.

One need not look far and long for examples of this "rhetorical push". We are living in the middle of a "religious" revival, and orators of this sort can be observed busily at work winning converts in every media. Of course this kind of persuasion has as its result a certain kind of Christian. Liselotte Richter, one of Kierkegaard's commentators applying his thought to modern social sciences, terms the Christian so won the "mass man".

Richter writes that the mass man "originates when the motive for joining the religious community is no longer a pure, conscious, religious decision but a mixture of emulation, expediency, and objective or impersonal necessity." The transition from not being a Christian to being a Christian happens to the "mass man" from without, and properly speaking is more caused than motivated. It is an urgent concern of Kierkegaard's authorship that in the present age individuals are becoming more and more the anonymous products of manipulators.

At least in part, the reason Kierkegaard terms Christianity of this kind "aesthetic Christianity" is because the kind of oratory which gives rise to it seeks to gain acceptance on the basis of aesthetic considerations. The orator dresses up the truth he seeks to communicate in as attractive a suit as his words can fashion in order to draw people to it. Such fashion we call eloquence. One who is audience to eloquent oration is likely to confuse eloquence with truth, and to accept or reject what is said by assessing it according to aesthetic criteria. This is why Kierkegaard writes in Authority and Revelation that "Paul must not recommend himself and his doctrine by the help of beautiful metaphors; conversely, he should say to the individual: 'Whether the simile is beautiful or not, or whether it is tattered and threadbare, that is of no account' (108). The concern is that someone will adopt the

right position, but for the wrong sort of reasons.

In a journal entry Kierkegaard draws an interesting parallel between eloquence and probability in terms of the influence they exert over an audience:

> All the ancients(Plato—many places in Phaedrus, Gorgias, etc.; Aristotle in Rhetoric, the later ancients after Plato and Aristotle) were unanimous, as were other later ones who thought about the matter, that the potency of eloquence is based upon probability.
>
> Christianity is the paradox. When it came into the world there was no eloquence(for the apostles and the martyrs were far from being eloquent speaker; there lives were paradoxes and their words paradoxes just as Christianity is)....
>
> Christianity is now made probable—and so eo ipso the rhetoricians flourish. With reasons upon reasons, they are able to depict and depict and bellow and make Christianity so probable, so probable—that it most likely is no longer Christianity. (X^4 A633)

When the matter submitted to an audience for consideration is an object of faith and not of knowledge, an oration which praises it on the basis of its overwhelming probability is a misunderstanding. As was discussed in the second chapter, probability is inversely related to belief; the more probable something is the more difficult it is to believe it. Probability, whether established by eloquence or proofs, is at odds with belief. This relationship between probability and belief is the basis for Kierkegaard's polemic against Christian apologetics.

The second option referred to in the passage earlier quoted from the Postscript is best viewed polemically against the first. Its telos is not simply to gain an audience's acceptance of a proposal, but to get them to

accept it in a certain way. Since the proper relationship to Christian doctrine is belief, oration about it should seek to generate belief. Eloquent oration and appeals to probabilities are effective for winning an audience's acceptance of a proposal, but such acceptance is not belief. Indeed, such acceptance stands in the way of belief. In a journal entry Kierkegaard writes:

> Aristotle places the art of speaking and the media for awakening faith in relationship to probability, so that it is concerned(in contrast to knowledge) with what can be relevant in another way. Christian eloquence will be distinguished from the Greek in that it is concerned only with improbability, with showing that it is improbable, in order that one can then believe it. Here probability is to be rejected just as much as improbability in the other, but both have the same distinction from knowledge. (VI A19)

For any communication, it is important to distinguish between matters of faith and matters of probability. Just as each is properly appropriated in its own way, so too the manner of speaking best suited for the communication of either is one that is tailored to bring about the kind of appropriation proper to it. Kierkegaard does not categorically reject oration which seeks to gain someone's adherence on the basis of the probability of its proposal. Indeed for many matters, especially scientific ones, this is the appropriate way to proceed. For other matters, however, such as Christian doctrine, this way of proceeding is a misunderstanding.

In the Postscript Climacus requests that we "Suppose Christianity never intended to be understood; suppose that,

in order to express this, and to prevent anyone from misguidedly entering upon the objective way, it has declared itself to be the paradox" (191-2). To enter into Christianity in the "objective way" would be to skip the detour through inwardness and appropriation. Paradox guards against such a direct entry in that it has the effect of interrupting immediacy; it puzzles, generates questions, induces reflection. These activities mark the awakening of inwardness, the birth of subjectivity. A paradox is the antithesis of a probability. Whereas a probability pulls us toward it, a paradox arrests us and holds us back, perhaps even offends us.

In the Postscript Climacus explains that his method of communicating is tailored to suit his subject matter. He seeks to provide an introduction not to Christianity, but to becoming a Christian. He explains:

> For there is no immediate transition from the introduction to the becoming a Christian, the transition rather constituting a qualitative leap. Such an introduction is therefore in a sense repellent, precisely because the usual introduction, in view of the decisiveness of the qualitative leap, would here be a contradiction. An introduction of the present type does not make it easier to enter upon that to which it introduces, but rather makes it difficult. In view of the fact that being a Christian is thought to be the highest good, it may be beautiful and well meaning to try to help people become Christians by making it easy for them. Nevertheless, I am content to bear the responsibility for making it difficult within the limits of my capacity, as difficult as possible, though without making it more difficult than it is; such a responsibility may be cheerfully undertaken in a mere experiment. My idea is that if Christianity is the highest good, it is better for me to know definitely that I do not possess it, so that I may put forth every

> effort to acquire it; rather than that I should imagine that I have it, deluding myself, so that it does not even occur to me to seek it. (340)

Thus instead of attracting his reader's to Christianity by making it appear desirable or probable, Climacus puts it at a distance so that it can be properly recognized in its ideality.

It will be useful to consider once again Kierkegaard's explanation that he is not presenting a new "what" but rather a new "how" of an old "what". The old "what" is of course Christian dogma, and the new "how" refers to the kind of understanding and appropriation indirect communication solicits. Kierkegaard believes that the manner in which Christian orators typically go about educating people to understand this dogma is a misunderstanding. In a journal entry he writes:

> A new science must be introduced: the Christian art of speaking to be constructed ad modum Aristotle's Rhetoric. Dogmatics as a whole is a misunderstanding, especially as it has now been developed. (VI A17)

The reason dogmatics is a misunderstanding is because it has not been presented in such a way as to solicit the kind of appropriation proper to it. Kierkegaard has no contention with dogma per se, only with the way it is commonly misunderstood and communicated. In opposition to this misunderstanding, he cautiously guards his speech from being rote-learned.

The sorts of considerations that might prompt an orator to accomodate the form of his communication to suit

the kind of appropriation proper to his subject matter are especially clear in ethics. In ethics the essential thing is not the "what" but the "how", not the external movement but the intention, not the twitch but the wink. There is a danger surrounding the communication of dogma in ethics that a "what" will be immediately assimilated without the appropriate "how". Complete handbooks in ethics proscribing conduct for situations ranging from serious to banal would be likely to discourage the kind of appropriation proper to ethics. Such a list of "do's" and "don'ts" might foster pathological reliance upon rules. This has been tragically demonstrated in Hitler's Germany. The following quote from a German officer at the Nuremberg trials is a profane testimony to this danger:

> "I could only say Jawohl," Hoss, commandant of Auschwitz, later confessed. "It didn't occur to me at all that I would be held responsible. Don't you see, we SS men were not supposed to think about these things; it never even occured to us.... We were all so trained to obey orders, without even thinking, that the thought of disobeying an order would simply never have occured to anybody, and somebody else would have done it just as well if I hadn't."[19]

According to Kierkegaard's teaching, ethics cannot be taught dogmatically without contradicting its spirit. Outside of the parent-child relationship, one person cannot, ethically speaking, tell another what he must do. In a journal entry he writes that "This Socratic thesis is of utmost importance for Christianity:Virtue cannot be taught; that is, it is not a doctrine, it is a being-able, an

exercising, an existing, an existential transformation, and therefore it is slow to learn, not at all as simple and easy as the rote-learning of one more language or one more system" (X^2 A606). The emphasis is not so much on the "what" as on the "how". This is why Vigilius Haufniensis, the author of The Concept of Dread, insists that "The good cannot be defined."[20] It is not an object of knowledge. Ethics is premised not so much upon knowing the good as upon deciding what is good. With respect to knowledge the good is fundamentally uncertain.

Immanuel Kant shares the conviction that the good cannot be defined. There is an interesting parallel between Kierkegaard's method of indirect communication and the "paradox of method" which Kant refers to in explaining the design of his Critique of Practical Reason:

> The paradox is that the concept of good and evil is not defined prior to the moral law, to which, it would seem, the former would have to serve as a foundation; rather the concept of good and evil must be defined after and by means of the law.[21]

Thus Kant does not begin with a definition of the good from which a list of rules and prohibitions could be derived. This would only encourage mindless obedience. Instead he begins with a discussion of how it is possible for someone to decide upon what is good. The point is that if someone learns to decide or judge for himself, he will gain independence from the authority of others. The point is to decrease dependence upon rules and handbooks and shift the

responsibility onto the individual. This paradox of method, Kant continues, "explains once and for all the reasons which occasion all the confusion of the philosophers concerning the supreme principle of morals."[22] Whereas others have begun with a definition of the good, Kant begins with the question of how to judge what is good. Here the emphasis does not fall on the good per se, but rather upon how what is deemed to be good comes to be established as such.

Climacus makes a similar point in the Postscript in a context where he is explaining that indirectness is occasioned by an unwillingness to communicate results:

> For if inwardness is the truth, results are only rubbish with which we should not trouble each other. The communication of results is an unnatural form of intercourse between man and man, in so far as every man is a spiritual being, for whom the truth consists in nothing else than the self-activity of personal appropriation, which the communication of a result tends to prevent. (216-7)

The communication of a result, such as a definition of the good, is likely to discourage others from beginning the process of "self-activity" that leads to the result. The same is true of the relationship between a question and an answer. The communication of an answer is a misunderstanding if the question to which it is an answer has not been asked in the first place. In this case the first thing for a teacher to do would be to induce the learner to experience the question rather than filling him up with answers for rote-learning.

The search for a definition of justice in Book I of

the Republic is relevant to this discussion. Socrates solicits from his interlocutors definitions of justice which he subjects to careful scrutiny. His dissatisfaction is not directed at the proposed definitions as such, but rather at his interlocutors' uncritical appropriation of them. His contention is not so much with what they believe as with how they have come to believe what they believe. His purpose is to bring the definitions into question. As befits the dialectical nature of the subject matter, the first book of the Republic ends not with an ultimate definition of justice, but rather with Socrates admitting that as yet he does not know what justice is.[23]

There is a superficial resemblance between Adler and Socrates in that both renege on an anticipated definition. There is a world of difference however. Had Adler taken the time to reflect upon his subject matter he likely would have arrived at a firm definition whereas it is precisely because Socrates undertook such reflection. that no such definition is given. Vigilius Haufniensis explains that he is reticent about defining certain concepts

> not because I am fond of the modern fluent way of thinking which has abolished definitions and lets everything coalesce, but because when it is a question of existential concepts it is always a sign of surer tact to abstain from definitions, because one does not like to construe in the form of a definition which so easily makes something else and something different out of a thought which essentially must be understood in a different fashion and which one has understood differently and has loved in an entirely different way. The man who really loves can hardly find pleasure and satisfaction, not to say increase of love,

> by busying himself with a definition of what love really is.(Concept of Dread, 131)

A lover's reluctance to fix his passion in a formula so that others who have never experienced the passion can learn it by rote is something different from the vagueness of one who has had neither the time or passion to reflect upon it.

From what has been said we can understand why an author concerned not only with having his reader adopt his "what", but with having him appropriate it in a certain way, would tailor his communication to suit the kind of response appropriate to it. If the kind of appropriation suitable for his communication required some sort of activity from the reader, he would construct his text in such a way as to solicit this activity. At the same time this might involve taking precautions to ward off the sorts of interferences that might hinder the occurrence of this activity. Given that the only way into Christianity proper is through the Thermopylae's pass of personal decision, helping another to this decision would consist in preparing the way for it.

Ultimately the point of Kierkegaard's employment of indirect communication is to force a decision with respect to the matter of becoming a Christian, but in such a way as not to interfere with the decision by the intrusion of extraneous influences. Only in this qualified sense is indirect communication a tactic for persuading people to become Christians. David Swenson rightly stresses the importance of preserving the difference "so often insisted

upon in the Kierkegaardian literature between ordinary methods of persuasion and that form of communication which Kierkegaard has erected into a category, namely, 'indirect' communication."[24] Swenson, who is quoted here not to add prestige to my argument but for the reason that he presents the issue clearly and succinctly, continues:

> In this latter form the reader is indeed helped, because the question at issue is clarified for him. But he is not coddled or tricked or allured, and the responsibility for a choice remains with him, there being no authority to influence his decision by the intrusion of an alien prestige.

Whereas other forms of persuasion trick someone into adopting a proposal in such a way as to conceal the need for a decision, indirect communication tricks someone into making a decision.

The texts of Johannes Climacus come into their proper light when we read them as being constructed in such a way as to force a decision and thwart the possibility of an "alien prestige" interfering with it. "If anyone proposes to believe, i.e., imagines himself to believe," Climacus writes in Philosophical Fragments, "because many good and upright people living here on the hill have believed, i.e., have said that they believed...then he is a fool, and it is essentially indifferent whether he believes on account of his own and perhaps widely held opinion about what good and upright people believe, or believes a Munchausen."[25] In particular, he is concerned to discourage others from believing simply because he believes. This is why he

announces himself as a non-believer and renounces all claim to authority. In the preface to Philosophical Fragments he warns:

> But if anyone were to be so polite as to assume that I have an opinion, and if he were to carry his gallantry to the extreme of adopting this opinion because he believed it to be mine, I should have to be sorry for his politeness, in that it was bestowed upon so unworthy an object, and for his opinion, if he has no other opinion than mine. (6)

The point is that an opinion that is directly and immediately adopted cannot, properly speaking, be believed.

Because belief requires a certain activity from the believer, the testimony of a believer would at best be an occasion for this activity and never a substitute for it. Climacus writes:

> And if the testimony is what it ought to be, namely the testimony of a believer, it will give occasion for precisely the same ambiguity of the aroused attention as the witness himself has experienced...The believer on the other hand communicates his testimony in such form as to forbid immediate acceptance; for the words: I believe—in spite of the Reason and my own powers of invention, present a very serious counter-consideration.[26]

Belief can come into existence only in the face of uncertainty, and any attempt to eliminate the uncertainty is at the same time an attempt to eliminate belief.

In the Postscript Climacus tells us that "That the highest degree of resignation that a human being can reach is to acknowledge the given independence in every man, and after the measure of his ability do all that can in truth be done to help someone preserve it."[27] This is essentially the telos of indirect communication. Paul Holmer expresses

this succinctly:

> The highest responsibility is to choose one's subjectivity, to constitute it by one's decision. This is what indirect communication solicits.[28]

The point of indirect communication is to let the reader conclude for himself and assume responsibility for his conclusion. It is strikingly appropriate then, that Climacus concludes his text, or perhaps leaves it to his reader to conclude, with the admonition:

> So then the book is superfluous; let no one therefore take the pains to appeal to it as an authority; for he who thus appeals to it has eo ipso misunderstood it.[29]

CONCLUSION

There is something questionable about an author who writes a book to explain a book or collection of books he has earlier written. Normally this would be taken to mean that something was inadequate about the first, since it could not stand on its own. We can imagine the case of an author who writes his book without a sense of purpose and, sometime later, after the book has been written, comes to a conclusion. Perhaps at a later time, while reflecting upon his first book, it became clear to him what his purpose was. He then wrote a second book as an afterthought in order to explain the first from the standpoint of maturity and clarity that was lacking in its composition. Is this how we are to understand Kierkegaard's The Point of View for My Work as An Author, which is written as an explanation of his authorship up to that point? Not if we accept Kierkegaard's own explanation. He claims that he had a purpose in mind from the very beginning of his authorship. Why then, as we would expect, did he not state it from the beginning? Normally when one has a purpose in writing a book, one states it at the beginning so that the reader can follow along and see how the text develops out of the purpose. Why then does Kierkegaard work backwards, stating his purpose not at the beginning but at what he then intended to be the conclusion of [redacted]thorship?

In The Point of View for My Work as An Author Kierkegaard offers an explanation for his manner of proceeding. Someone might object, however, that it is methodologically unsound to use an author's account of his authorship as an explanation for it. Authors of Magister Adler's ilk give proof to the interpretive principle that casts suspicion on the reliability of an author as an interpreter of his own texts. Is is not naive to read an author's texts in terms of his statement of purpose? It has been known from ancient times that there is often, indeed usually, a wide gulf that separates who someone is and who someone thinks he is. This separation is the occasion for Socrates' biting irony. His motto, "know thyself", presupposes such separation, otherwise there would be no point in encouraging people to know themselves. If it is true that most people do not, in the Socratic sense, know themselves, what is the status of a description or explanation such a person gives of himself?

Kierkegaard is himself unwilling to accept someone's account of himself at face value. Otherwise he would believe, according to their own testimony, that the majority of those living in Christendom are Christians. We know, however, that he thinks that these people are confused. They call themselves Christians and entertain this as their self-image, yet from the standpoint of a third person, judging them not according to their own account but according to their works,

a different, more accurate account emerges. On the same principle that Kierkegaard assumes in rejecting someone's account of himself, why not reject his account?

In The Point of View for My Work as An Author he anticipates and answers the question raised above concerning the status of an author's statement of purpose in the interpretation of his texts. He begins the section entitled "The Explanation" with a discussion of this matter. As the explanation for his authorship, he states the thesis "That the author is and was a religious author".[1] In light of this thesis, he raises a question as to under what conditions an author's explanation is a trustworthy guide to the interpretation of his texts.

> It might seem that a mere protestation to this effect on the part of the author himself would be more than enough; for surely he knows best what is meant. For my part, however, I have little confidence in protestations with respect to literary productions and am inclined to take an objective view of my own works. If as a third person, in the role of a reader, I cannot substantiate the fact that what I affirm is so, and that it could not but be so, it would not occur to me to wish to win a cause which I regard as lost. If I were to begin qua author to protest, I might easily bring to confusion the whole work, which from first to last is dialectical.[2]

An important distinction is made here between an explanation offered qua author and qua third person. Because an author is not a privileged interpreter of his texts, it by no means follows that his interpretation is therefore inaccurate.

To accept an explanation given qua author is to accept it on the authority of the author alone. What the author claims about his texts is true simply because he says

it, and he is, after all, the authority for interpreting his own texts. Kierkegaard rejects this principle because he is profoundly aware of the distance between self and conception of self. An explanation given qua author and an explanation given by the same author qua third person differ in that as a third person an author is not permitted to appeal to special insight or authority. Thus Kierkegaard deliberately undermines his authority. For an explantion qua third person appeal is not made to authority, but to the actual works. The works are understood and judged in light of the explanation. Whether or not an explanation is acceptable is simple to decide. Either the author's works substantiate the explanation or they do not.

Kierkegaard asks us to accept his explanation only if we find that it is confirmed by careful consideration of his works. This is what this thesis, as an experiment of sorts, has tried to do. Beginning with Kierkegaard's statement of purpose as its hypothesis, this thesis confirms that hypothesis by examining his works in its light. This thesis concludes with a summary of that explanation given in The Point of View for My Work as An Author. This summary is at the same time a summary of this thesis, since this thesis, in substantiating Kierkegaard's explanation on the basis of his works, recapitulates the explanation.[2]

In the explanation the hypothesis is put forth that Kierkegaard began his authorship with a definite purpose

in mind. That purpose grew out of and came to be defined in terms of a diagnosed confusion (illusion). A widespread movement exists calling itself Christianity and using Christian language which is not Christianity. In response to this confusion, Kierkegaard came to understand his purpose to be that of introducing Christianity into Christendom. He realized that this required getting those who lived in Christendom to recognize their confusion.

Faced with the problem of correcting a confusion, Kierkegaard reflected upon possible ways of going about this task. From the first he rejected what he called a direct attack. Using such an approach, he would have set up an opposition between himself and his audience, as one standing outside of the confusion accusing those within of being hypocrites and deceivers. This could have led to a number of undesirable consequences. People might have branded him a fanatic or zealot, causing him to lose his credibility. Also, knowing the tendency people have to fall into idolatry, he feared that such an approach might attract disciples wistfully admiring him as being a truly extraordinary Christian. Instead of becoming Christians, they would become Kierkegaardians. And of course he was aware of how defense mechanisms work. When people are under attack, they tend to resist by constructing a defense or even offense, while what Kierkegaard hoped for was an admission of guilt. Such an approach, for these such reasons, would have been at odds with his purpose.

Instead of a direct approach, Kierkegaard decided to keep silent about his purpose in the beginning. He realized that the first thing to do was to attract the interest of an audience. This he does in the manner of a spy by going over to the other side. Seeking to find people where they are, he becomes acquainted with the interests and concerns they carry with them. For the most part these interests are aesthetic: eroticism, banquets, art, music, philosophy, boredom, and so on. Pseudonymously he authors a number of texts on these matters. These texts being interesting, he acquires an audience. In these texts he attempts to solicit from his audience not simple indulgence, but reflection upon the meaning and significance of aesthetic interests in general. He creates dramatic personae who embody the aesthetic view of life and at the same time mirror the aesthetic lifestyles of those in his audience.

Gradually Christianity is introduced, not from the pulpit, for reasons already considered, but from the position of an unbeliever. This vantage point allows Christianity to be seen in its ideality and establishes a discontinuity between Christendom and Christianity. This is done in the hope that those who take it for granted that they have come to terms with Christianity will become uncomfortable in their complacency, thus opening up the possibility of becoming. Christianity, when taken for

granted, is no longer Christianity. The only proper entrance into Christianity is the self-activity of he who, in consequence of his recognition of error, takes upon himself the task of becoming a Christian. The issue clarified, it is left to his reader to conclude what is to be made of it, or let the conclusion come from elsewhwere...

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

1 Kierkegaard, Authority and Revelation, p. 4.

2 Kierkegaard, The Point of View...

3 Kierkegaard, Postscript, pp. 551-4.

4 Kierkegaard, Authority and Revelation, p. 73.

5 Kierkegaard, Postscript, for a discussion of the parenthetical see p. 30.

6 Plato, Gorgias, p. 286.

7 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book I.

8 Aristotle, Poetics, see Chapter 9.

9 Kierkegaard, Postscript, for a discussion of this see p. 217.

10 Kierkegaard, Either/Or, Volume II p.5.

Chapter II

1 Plato, Phaedrus, p. 520.

2 Kierkegaard, Authority and Revelation, p. 195.

3 Authorized King James version.

4 Lowrie, A Short Life of Kierkegaard, p. 192.

5 Plato, Republic, pp. 580-6 (331d-336a).

6 Plato, Republic, p. 621 (375a), p. 698 (459a-c).

7 Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, pp. 200-9.

8 Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 19.

9 Kierkegaard, Authority and Revelation, p. 100.

10 See Chapter III.

11 Kierkegaard, Either/Or, Volume II p. 182.

12 Kierkegaard, Two Ages, p. 103.

13 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 93.

14 Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 245.

15 Kierkegaard, Concept of Dread, p. 65.

16 Kierkegaard, Either/Or, Volume II p. 179.

17 Ricoeur, Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, p. 7.

18 Shakespeare, Measure For Measure, p. 557 (III, 1).

19 Gilbert Ryle, Collected Papers, p. 480.

20 Holmer, The Grammar of Faith, p. xi.

21 Kierkegaard, Authority and Revelation, p. 100.

22 Aquinas, The Pocket Aquinas, p. 312.

23 Kierkegaard, Either/Or, Volume I p. 306.

24 Kierkegaard, Journals, Volume III p. 615.

25 Holmer, "On Understanding Kierkegaard", A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 41.

26 Kierkegaard, Journals, Volume III p. 65.

27 Kierkegaard, For Self-Examination, p. 101.

28 Kierkegaard, Journals, IX A11.

29 See Postscript, p. 310; Fear and Trembling, p. 108; Works of Love, p. 332; Stages on Life's Way, p. 364.

30 Kierkegaard, Edifying Discourses, p. 214.

31 Taylor, "Nuremberg and Viet Nam", An Age of Controversy, p.258.

32 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 29.

33 Fabro, "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic", A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 165.

34 Ibid., p. 162.

35 Ibid., p. 165.

36 Gilson, Reason and Revelation, p. 83.

37 Holmer, "Kierkegaard and Religious Propositions", Journal of Religion, Volume XXXV, Number 3, p. 146.

38 See Collins English Dictionary.

39 Kierkegaard, Authority and Revelation, p. 166.

40 Ibid., p. 71.

41 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, p. 391.

42 Ibid., p. 391.

43 See particularly Socrates' discussion with Polemarchus.

44 Kant, "What is Enlightment?", On History, p. 3.

45 Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 548.

46 Nietzche, Twilight of the Idols, p. 24.

47 Holmer, "Kierkegaard and Religious Propositions", Journal of Religion, Volume XXXV, Number 3, p. 143.

48 Kierkegaard, Either/Or, Volume II p. 5.

49 Kierkegaard, Concept of Dread, p. 151.

50 Ibid., p. 151.

51 See especially Section 2 of Gadamer's Truth and Method.

52 See p. 100 of this text.

53 Kierkegaard, For Self-Examination, p. 64.

54 Ibid., p. 64.

55 Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart, p. 157.

56 Shakespeare, Hamlet, p. 604 (II, ii).

57 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 221.

58 Ibid., p. 21.

59 See For Self-Examination for an explanation of the significance of speaking "without authority", p. 47.

60 Kierkegaard, For Self Examination, p. 50.

61 Ibid., p. 50.

62 Kierkegaard, Authority and Revelation, pp. 163-5.

63 Kierkegaard, Works of Love, p. 199.

Chapter III

1 Shakespeare, Hamlet, p. 17-24 (III,ii).

2 Kierkegaard, The Point of View..., p. 27.

3 Kierkegaard, Journals, VIII B89.

4 Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 67.

5 Ibid., p. 153.

6 Kierkegaard, Attack Upon Christendom, p. 97.

7 Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 469.

8 Kierkegaard, Journals, VIII A293.

9 Holmer, introductory essay to Edifying Discourses, p.xviii.

10 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 48.

11 Ibid., p. 48.

12 Ibid., p. 58.

13 Ibid., p. 102.

14 Ricoeur, "The Question of Proof in Freud", Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, pp. 199-200

15 Vico, The New Science, pp. 188-92.

16 Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart, p. 126.

17 Aristotle, Rhetoric, see Book I, Chapters 3 and 9.

18 Richter, "Kierkegaard and the Social Sciences", A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 59.

19 Toland, Hitler, p. 164.

20 Kierkegaard, Concept of Dread, p. 99.

21 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, p. 65.

22 Ibid., p. 66.

23 See the end of Book I of the Republic.

24 Swenson, introductory essay to Philosophical Fragments, p.xxvi.

25 Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, p. 129.

26 Ibid., p. 131.

27 Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 232-23.

28 Holmer, "Kierkegaard and Religious Propositions", Journal of Religion, Volume XXXV, Number 3, p. 146.

Conclusion

1 Kierkegaard, The Point of View..., p. 15.

2 Ibid., see all of text.

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