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TOO MUCH OF NOTHING: MODERN CULTURE, THE SELF AND
SALVATION IN KIERKEGAARD'S THOUGHT

University of California, Berkeley

PH.D. 1984

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Too Much of Nothing: Modern Culture, The Self and
Salvation in Kierkegaard's Thought

By

Jane Louise Rubin

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DISSERTATION

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DECEMBER 18, 1984

TOO MUCH OF NOTHING:
MODERN CULTURE, THE SELF AND SALVATION
IN KIERKEGAARD'S THOUGHT

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by

Jane Louise Rubin

"Too much of nothing

Can make a man ill at ease."

Bob Dylan, "Too Much of Nothing"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 1972, as a junior at Berkeley, I first attended the classes of the two teachers who were to become, respectively, my dissertation chairman and the chairman of my graduate program, Hubert L. Dreyfus and Robert N. Bellah. Twelve years later, as I complete my dissertation and my graduate program, I am indebted to both of them in more ways than I can name and I am grateful that I will be able to look back upon my years at Berkeley as years whose history is, to a great extent, the history of their influence and inspiration.

I could not even have begun this dissertation, much less completed it, without Hubert Dreyfus' work on Kierkegaard. Professor Dreyfus' interpretation of Kierkegaard, as he presented it in his course, "Backgrounds of Existentialism and Phenomenology", provided the foundation upon which all of my own thinking about Kierkegaard developed. Many of the ideas in this dissertation were developed in the Kierkegaard course which we taught together over a period of six years. Without our innumerable dialogues and debates in class and at lunch, this dissertation would have been literally inconceivable.

At least as important as Professor Dreyfus' influence on the content of my thinking is his influence on its style. As an undergraduate in his lecture courses, I learned from his example how to read and ask questions of a

text in such a way as to make it my own. As a graduate student, I learned, both from Professor Dreyfus' own work and from his detailed and thorough criticism of my work, that believing in my own ideas meant struggling to make them as clear as possible and that clarity could only strengthen my conviction of their truth.

Finally, Professor Dreyfus' most important influence upon me may be the influence which I hope I can pass on to my own students. Professor Dreyfus' willingness to work out his ideas in class, to include students in this process, and to revise or change his ideas under student influence are qualities which I hope to be able to emulate in my own teaching. Professor Dreyfus' relationship to his graduate students-- his treatment of students as colleagues and his encouragement of independent thinking-- is an example for me of the relationship between professor and graduate student at its best. It is a relationship for which I will always be grateful.

Robert Bellah's undergraduate course in the Sociology of Religion gave me an example of a kind of committed scholarship which takes the claims of religious traditions and modern thought with equal seriousness in understanding and addressing the critical issues which confront our society and our culture. That example continues to inform my understanding of the meaning and importance of the study of religion in the university. Professor Bellah's graduate seminars introduced me to the tradition of Western social and political thought from Plato to Durkheim. The seminars

and our conversations served as continual reminders that the issues of the relationship between the individual self and modern culture which this dissertation addresses can only be adequately understood against the background of the conflict between traditional and modern conceptions of the relationship between the individual and society. Though we disagree about the role of Kierkegaard's thought in that conflict, my understanding of Kierkegaard and his importance for our culture would be severely diminished without Professor Bellah's continued influence and criticism.

I first became acquainted with Charles Taylor and with his work ten years ago when he was a visiting professor in the Department of Philosophy at Berkeley. Since that time, his work on understanding in the human sciences and on the problems of self-understanding has been a major influence on my work. Professor Taylor read every chapter of this work in draft and offered invaluable suggestions for its improvement. He was especially helpful in clarifying many of the individual arguments and in placing Kierkegaard's work within a broader context of Western thought. Though time limitations have kept me from incorporating many of his suggestions into the dissertation, these suggestions will be of invaluable importance for future revisions. Professor Taylor's generosity not only with his time but, even more, in the style of his criticism-- his openness to and interest in this project, his devotion to helping me improve it and his continual expressions of his belief in

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- ED Edifying Discourses, David F. and Lillian Marvin Swenson, trans., (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1958).
- E/O I Either/Or Volume I, David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson, trans., (Princeton, NJ; Princeton, University Press, 1944).
- E/O II Either/Or Volume II, Walter Lowrie, trans., (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1944).
- FT Fear and Trembling, Walter Lowrie, trans., (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1941).
- FSE For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourselves!, Walter Lowrie, trans., (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1944).
- PA The Present Age, Alexander Dru, trans., (New York, NY; Harper and Row, 1962).
- PF Philosophical Fragments, David Swenson and Howard V. Hong, trans., (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1936, 1962).

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INTRODUCTION

1

The study which follows is an interpretation of the thought of Soren Kierkegaard. It argues that Kierkegaard's thought is a coherent and original analysis of the problem of modern culture and of the possible responses to that problem. Furthermore, it argues that Kierkegaard's analysis of the problem and of the possible responses to it is at least as important for our understanding of our own culture as it is for our understanding of the early nineteenth century Denmark in which Kierkegaard lived and wrote.

To call this study an interpretation is to use the word "interpretation" in two related senses. In the first sense, this study interprets Kierkegaard's thought in the light of our experience of and knowledge about contemporary culture. For example, it interprets Kierkegaard's remarks about the levelling effects of the Danish press in the light of our contemporary experience of the mass media and it interprets Kierkegaard's ethical sphere of existence in the light of our contemporary knowledge about Freud and therapy.

In the second sense, this study interprets

contemporary culture in the light of our understanding of Kierkegaard's thought. Not only does it interpret Kierkegaard's thought in the light of television and therapy, in other words. It also interprets television and therapy in the light of Kierkegaard's thought. Kierkegaard's thought allows us to recognize and understand the significance of these contemporary cultural phenomena.

Now, the attempt to interpret Kierkegaard's thought in these two senses cannot help but invite objections. In the first place, Kierkegaard obviously was not talking about television or therapy. What, then, is the justification for our talking about them? And what does it mean to interpret Kierkegaard's thought in the light of them? Are we not illegitimately reading our contemporary concerns into Kierkegaard's texts?

In the second place, it may be objected that we have no justification for interpreting Kierkegaard as allowing us to recognize and understand the significance of contemporary cultural phenomena. Why, in other words, should we recognize television or therapy as culturally significant? The fact that Kierkegaard's thought allows us to claim that they are significant does not mean that they are, in fact, significant. Why should we interpret contemporary culture in the light of Kierkegaard's thought?

The chapters that follow will attempt to answer both of the preceding sets of objections by demonstrating that

interpreting Kierkegaard's thought in the light of contemporary culture and interpreting contemporary culture in the light of Kierkegaard's thought allows us to recognize the systematic coherence of Kierkegaard's thought. In claiming that the best justification of an interpretation of Kierkegaard's thought is its revelation of the systematic coherence of that thought, we are being faithful to a Kierkegaardian interpretive principle. In his retrospective review of his authorship entitled The Point of View for My Work as An Author: A Report to History, Kierkegaard claims that his entire authorship is unified by a religious intent. He admonishes his readers not to take his word for this, however, and, instead, to let his texts speak for themselves. The correct interpretation of his works, Kierkegaard says, is not the interpretation which corresponds to the author's stated intentions but is, rather, the interpretation which makes the most coherent sense of the texts:

But everybody will admit that when one is able to show with respect to a phenomenon that it cannot be explained in any other way, and that in this particular way it can be explained in every detail, or that the explanation fits at every point, then this explanation is substantiated as evidently as it is ever possible to establish the correctness of an explanation. (PV 15-16)

In this interpretation, then, we will not attempt to answer the question of why a Danish author writing in the 1840's provides us with so many insights about Western-- and, more specifically, American-- culture in the 1980's.

We will simply attempt to demonstrate that he does provide us with these insights and that these insights, in turn, provide us with the keys to a coherent understanding of his thought. Kierkegaard himself dismissed in advance all debate about his status as cultural prophet when he said at the conclusion of The Present Age:

In our times, when so little is done, an extraordinary number of prophecies, apocalypses, glances at and studies of the future appear, and there is nothing to do but to join in and be one with the rest. Yet I have the advantage over the many who bear a heavy responsibility when they prophesy and give warnings, because I can be perfectly certain that no one would think of believing me. So I do not ask that any one should make a cross in their calendar or otherwise bother to see whether my words are fulfilled. If they are fulfilled, then people will have something else to think about than my accidental being and if they are not fulfilled, well, then I shall simply be a prophet in the modern sense of the word-- for a prophet nowadays means to prognosticate and nothing more. In a certain sense a prophet cannot do anything else. It was providence that fulfilled the words of the older prophets, so perhaps we modern prophets, lacking the addition coming from providence, might say with Thales: what we predict will either happen or not; for to us too has God granted the gift of prophecy. (PA 85-86)

2

An interpretation which claims to be the most coherent and systematic interpretation of an author's works must, of course, defend its claim by demonstrating that it is more systematic and coherent than other interpretations. The amount of secondary literature on Kierkegaard is immense and it is obviously impossible to take explicit account of all of it. Even when we restrict ourselves to works written in English which are devoted to an interpretation of Kierkegaard's texts themselves-- and not, for instance, to Kierkegaard's biography or personal psychology-- the amount of literature is overwhelming.

The only reasonable way to circumvent this problem is, of course, to identify some general pattern or patterns into which interpretations of Kierkegaard's work generally fall. We will argue here that interpretations of Kierkegaard's works in English fall into two distinct categories and that these categories correspond to two relatively distinct periods of Kierkegaard scholarship. The first period, which reached its height in the years immediately following the Second World War, when most of Kierkegaard's works were available in English for the first time, is represented by such works as David F. Swenson's

Something About Kierkegaard and Reidar Thomte's Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion. Because they were addressing an audience which was largely unfamiliar with Kierkegaard's works, these interpretations tended to be straightforward presentations of Kierkegaard's major ideas with little attempt either to problematize the issues in Kierkegaard's thought or to arrive at a systematic interpretation of it. Their intent, in other words, was not so much to arrive at an appraisal of Kierkegaard's work and the truth of his ideas as it was to give the reader an appreciation of them. Thus, their relationship to philosophical analysis was parallel to the relationship of plot summaries to genuine literary criticism.

The second period of Kierkegaard scholarship has reached its height in the last ten years. It is represented by such works as Louis Mackey's Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet, Mark C. Taylor's Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self, Alastair Hannay's Kierkegaard and John W. Elrod's Being and Existence in Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works and Kierkegaard and Christendom. Unlike the earlier scholarship, these works assume familiarity with Kierkegaard's basic ideas and are interested in appraisal, rather than simply appreciation, of those ideas. Thus, they attempt to problematize the issues in Kierkegaard's thought and attempt to arrive at an overall interpretation of it.

The best way to illustrate the difference between the

two periods of Kierkegaard scholarship-- and, indeed, to support our claim that the difference, in fact, exists-- is to examine in some detail a representative work from each period. As was stated above, David F. Swenson's Something About Kierkegaard and Reidar Thomte's Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion are representative of works from the first period of Kierkegaard scholarship. Because the structure of Thomte's work resembles the structure of this work insofar as it begins with a discussion of the cultural problem which Kierkegaard's work addresses and proceeds through a discussion of the spheres of existence, we will discuss Thomte's work in some detail here in order to demonstrate that the similarities between Thomte's work and the present work are, at best, superficial. At the same time, we will include references to Swenson's much less systematic work-- the book is, in fact, a collection of separate essays-- at the points at which it parallels citations from Thomte.

The first problem which pervades works such as Swenson and Thomte's is precisely their failure to define with any rigor the problem or problems to which Kierkegaard's work is addressed. Thus, Thomte restricts his account of the problem to which Kierkegaard's work addresses itself to the claim that Kierkegaard defended ethical choice against metaphysical contemplation (Thomte 8-9; Swenson 17, 28-29, 59) and the individual against the collective (Thomte 9-10). Thus, in summarizing his account of the problem to

which Kierkegaard's work addresses itself, Thomte says:

To sum up: Kierkegaard diagnosed the disease of his age as a divorce of life and thinking. Men had forgotten the significance of existing as human individuals; they had lost themselves in a speculative contemplation of world history. The attitude of the observer (a purely objective attitude) had replaced choice and decision in human striving. (Thomte 14)

As we will see in Chapter I, Kierkegaard's analysis of the disease of his age is highly complex and sophisticated and can hardly be reduced to such simple formulas as contemplation versus action or the collective versus the individual. Furthermore, even on this most simple level, Thomte's analysis is simply incorrect. As we shall see in Chapter I, it is precisely a peculiarly modern form of individualism which provides the rationale for the particular kind of collectivizing tendencies of the present age which result in what Kierkegaard calls the "public". Furthermore, as we shall see in Chapters IV and V, the ethical and Religiousness A spheres of existence each promote a particular kind of collective vision-- the ethical, a vision which claims that the interests of the individual and the interests of the collective are complementary; Religiousness A, a vision which claims that the interests of the collective take precedence over the interests of the individual. Insofar as the lower spheres of existence are relativized, but never abandoned, in the highest sphere, Religiousness B, the claim that Kierkegaard's works promote an individual, as opposed to a

collective, vision of human existence simply has no basis in the texts.

But Thomte's failure adequately to define the problem of the age-- indeed, even to mention the work in which Kierkegaard most thoroughly discusses this problem, The Present Age (Swenson 100)-- is not an isolated failure. It is, rather, representative of Thomte's larger failure to problematize anything in Kierkegaard's work at all. Thus, to cite several examples: Thomte acknowledges that A, the pseudonym who writes from the perspective of the aesthetic sphere of existence, describes that sphere in eight separate pieces in the first volume of Either/Or but Thomte never asks whether these eight pieces represent different stages of the aesthetic sphere and whether these pieces are to be read in the order of these stages. (Thomte 23-34; Swenson 17-18, 82-84, 166, 170) Similarly, in his account of the ethical sphere of existence, Thomte acknowledges that, at the very end of his account of the ethical sphere, Judge William, the pseudonym who writes from the perspective of that sphere, claims that everyone is an exception to the universal claims of the ethical sphere. But Thomte never recognizes that, in making this claim, Judge William completely undermines his own position and Thomte certainly never raises the question of why Judge William would do so. (Thomte 52)

Indeed, though Thomte acknowledges that Kierkegaard employs indirect discourse in describing the aesthetic and

ethical spheres of existence, Thomte is completely oblivious to the meaning and significance of Kierkegaard's use of indirect discourse. As we shall see throughout this work, indirect discourse, as Kierkegaard employs it in his descriptions of the aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence, is related to the fact that each of these spheres represents a contradictory definition of the self. Because the people who claim to exist in these spheres have a vested interest in covering up their contradictions, we cannot take their defenses of their spheres at face value. Thomte, however, is completely insensitive to this issue and, as a result, simply accepts unquestioningly Judge William's claim that the absolute choice of the self which is the foundation of the ethical sphere is not arbitrary. (Thomte 211; Swenson 51, 119-120, 121-122) Because he has no insight into why the ethical breaks down, he has no insight into Judge William's attempt to cover up the breakdown.

Thomte's failure to problematize issues in Kierkegaard is not, of course, limited to his discussions of the aesthetic and ethical spheres but extends to his discussion of the religious spheres of existence as well. Thus, Thomte reiterates Kierkegaard's claim that faith cannot be communicated directly but he never asks why it cannot be communicated directly or what it means to say that it cannot be communicated directly. (Thomte 62) Thomte acknowledges Kierkegaard's contrast between the lower

immediacy of the aesthetic sphere of existence and the higher immediacy of Religiousness B but he never explains the difference between the two. (Thomte 62) Indeed, Thomte claims that passion, or the higher immediacy, means "intense emotions" (Thomte 60; Swenson 26-27, 69, 161), a view which Kierkegaard explicitly rejects and which vitiates the very contrast between the lower and the higher immediacy which Thomte is attempting to explain.

The upshot of Thomte's failure to problematize the issues in Kierkegaard's thought is that his interpretation has no systematic unity or coherence but is basically a scattershot approach to Kierkegaard's work. Thus, for example, Thomte notes that the despair of the aesthetic sphere of existence involves a "nihilistic passion" (Thomte 32) and that it is the result "not..of evil but...of indifference" (Thomte 36) but Thomte utterly fails to recognize that nihilism and indifference are the defining characteristics of the despairs of all of the lower spheres of existence and that this is the case precisely because these spheres fail to define the self in such a way as to overcome the central problem of the present age which is precisely nihilism and indifference. Similarly, Thomte notes that human equality is a major theme in Kierkegaard's edifying works (Thomte 144) but utterly fails to recognize that the issue of how to overcome nihilism while being faithful to the ideal of human equality is the major issue which unifies all of Kierkegaard's work.

In a similar vein, Thomte asserts that there is a difference between the Religiousness A and Religiousness B spheres of existence but he defines both spheres as involving an absolute relationship to absolute ends and a relative relationship to relative ends. (Thomte 172-173) Thomte never raises the question of how the two spheres are different, except to mention that Christ plays a role in Religiousness B which he does not play in Religiousness A. But Thomte never says what that role is or asks why the addition of Christ makes the difference between Religiousness A and Religiousness B. Indeed, Thomte continually cites works which, as we will demonstrate in Chapter V, are written from the perspective of Religiousness A-- works such as Works of Love and For Self-Examination-- to support his interpretation of Religiousness B. (Swenson 103)

Finally, in his discussion of the ordering of the spheres of existence, Thomte mentions that each of the spheres of existence is characterized by a different relation to time. (Thomte 102-107; Swenson 176-177) But he does not spell out what these different relations are and he gives absolutely no evidence that he has recognized that the order of the spheres is the order of successive attempts to define what Kierkegaard calls the "factors" of the self-- infinite and finite, possibility and necessity, and the eternal and the temporal-- in such a way as to overcome the nihilism of the present age. Thomte gives no

account of how the factors are defined differently in the different spheres and, indeed, does not even recognize that this could be a question. Thus, he completely ignores that which, as we shall see in Chapters II through VI, provides the structure for understanding Kierkegaard's response to the problem of the present age.

In short, while it may be reasonable to claim that works such as Thomte's played a useful role when English-speaking readers were completely unfamiliar with Kierkegaard's thought, it is clear that these works have outlived their usefulness. Because they do not problematize any issues in Kierkegaard's thought, they are basically collections of unrelated assertions, many of which are simply incorrect. It comes as no surprise, then, that more recent scholarship on Kierkegaard, which assumes a basic familiarity with his thought, constitutes a marked improvement over works such as Thomte's. Works such as the ones by Mackey, Taylor, Hannay and Elrod mentioned above make serious attempts to problematize the issues in Kierkegaard's thought and to provide coherent and systematic interpretations of it. It is possible, however, to make a distinction between two types of more recent interpretations of Kierkegaard's thought. The first type, which includes Mackey's Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet, Taylor's Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship, and Hannay's Kierkegaard are examples of what Taylor calls the "descriptive-thematic approach" (Taylor 27) to Kierkegaard

interpretation. These works, in other words, take a particular theme and attempt to follow it consistently through Kierkegaard's work but they do not claim that this theme unifies Kierkegaard's thought as a whole or that there could not be other, equally coherent interpretations of other themes in Kierkegaard's thought. Thus, Mackey is interested in demonstrating that Kierkegaard's mode of discourse is poetic and evocative rather than philosophical and argumentative. Taylor is interested in demonstrating that Kierkegaard is concerned with the relationship between self-understanding and temporality throughout his pseudonymous works. Hannay is interested in Kierkegaard's status as a philosopher both in relation to the philosophical tradition and in relation to recent developments in analytic philosophy.

In contrast to these three works, Elrod's two books, Being and Existence in Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works and Kierkegaard and Christendom attempt to do what this dissertation attempts to do-- namely, to define the problem which Kierkegaard's work addresses and to show that Kierkegaard's work is coherent and systematic when it is seen as addressing this problem. In both their intent and their structure, in other words, Elrod's works resemble the present work more closely than do any of the other interpretations of Kierkegaard's thought. By showing how the argument of this work differs from the argument of Elrod's works, therefore, we can support the claim of this

work to be an original interpretation of Kierkegaard's thought.

In Kierkegaard and Christendom, Elrod presents an analysis of the problem which Kierkegaard's thought addresses which, more than any other analysis, resembles the analysis presented in Chapter I of this dissertation. Unlike Thomte, Elrod recognizes that Kierkegaard's criticism of modern culture involves a criticism of a particular kind of individualism-- namely, a self-interested, egalitarian individualism. (Elrod b xvii, 64-65) Elrod claims, as does this dissertation, that this self-interested, egalitarian individualism is intimately related to what Kierkegaard calls the "levelling" tendencies of modern culture and that the most destructive result of levelling, from Kierkegaard's perspective, is that people "are unable to make a real commitment". (Elrod b 68)

Elrod's interpretation of the problem which Kierkegaard's thought addresses, differs, however, in a fundamental respect from the interpretation being presented here and this difference has repercussions for Elrod's interpretation of Kierkegaard's thought as a whole. Elrod sees self-interested, egalitarian individualism as the fundamental problem which Kierkegaard's thought addresses and he therefore claims that Kierkegaard's solution to the problem involves the proposal that individuals overcome their narrow self-interest and recognize their true

equality before God in a religious love of neighbor. Elrod is joined in this assessment of the problem and its solution by Hannay (Hannay 241-301) and by Michael Plekon (Plekon 146-150).

This dissertation, in contrast, claims that while Kierkegaard's thought addresses the problems of the types of individualism and egalitarianism which Elrod describes, these problems are not the most fundamental problems which Kierkegaard's thought addresses. Thus, while Elrod argues that levelling is the consequence of individualism and egalitarianism, this dissertation argues that individualism and egalitarianism are rationalizations of the levelling process. Kierkegaard's real problem, in other words, is that levelling has undermined what he calls "qualitative distinctions" and that it has thus made real commitment extremely difficult to achieve. Self-interested, egalitarian individualism is a rationalization of the flight from commitment.

Now, as we stated at the beginning of this discussion, we can only defend our interpretation of Kierkegaard's thought against the competing interpretations to the extent that we can demonstrate that our interpretation accounts for more of the significant details of Kierkegaard's thought than do the competing interpretations. It is crucial to note, therefore, that Elrod does not claim to be able to demonstrate that all of Kierkegaard's thought addresses the problems of individualism and egalitarianism

which Elrod describes in Kierkegaard and Christendom. Indeed, precisely the opposite is the case. The central thesis of Kierkegaard and Christendom is that only those works which Elrod refers to collectively as Kierkegaard's "second literature"-- "those published and unpublished writings that were composed after the publication of Concluding Unscientific Postscript in 1846" (Elrod b xi) address these problems while "the more philosophically oriented pseudonymous works published between 1840 and 1846" (Elrod b xi) do not. This thesis accounts for Elrod's division of his work on Kierkegaard into two books, the first of which, Being and Existence in Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works, addresses the issues of Kierkegaard's "first literature" and the second of which, Kierkegaard and Christendom addresses the issues of Kierkegaard's "second literature".

This dissertation argues, in opposition to Elrod, that the distinction between Kierkegaard's first and second literature is a false distinction and that Kierkegaard's writings from both periods are part of the same coherent and systematic analysis of and response to the problem of levelling which Kierkegaard defines in The Present Age. Our interpretation has the advantage, furthermore, of being able to account for Elrod's interpretation in a way in which Elrod would not be able to account for our interpretation. As we will argue in Chapter V, Kierkegaard does have a place for the religious love of neighbor which

Elrod describes. His place for it is exactly where Elrod finds it-- in the religious works which Kierkegaard wrote under his own name. (Elrod b 164-192) These works, as Kierkegaard tells us in The Point of View for My Work as an Author are written from the perspective of Religiousness A. Religiousness A, however, as Kierkegaard also tells us in The Point of View is not the highest sphere of existence. It is not the highest sphere of existence because, as we shall demonstrate in Chapter V, while it has overcome narrow self-interest and is truly egalitarian, it cannot overcome the levelling of the present age.

Elrod, in contrast both to Kierkegaard's own assessment and to our assessment in Chapter VI, argues that the works which are written from the perspective of Religiousness B do not represent a different religious position from that which is represented by the works which are written from the perspective of Religiousness A. Rather, Elrod argues, they are "polemical" works which show how the adoption of a religious position inevitably entails opposition to and from the present age. (Elrod b 193-248) Our interpretation, on the other hand, is able to account for Kierkegaard's claim that Religiousness B is a distinct sphere of existence, and, at the same time, is able to account for everything Elrod says about Kierkegaard's solution to the problem of the present age in its account of Religiousness A.

Not only does our interpretation allow us to account

for Elrod's interpretation and for Kierkegaard's claim that Religiousness A and Religiousness B are distinct spheres of existence, however. It also allows us to demonstrate that the analysis of the self which Elrod claims is the cornerstone of Kierkegaard's "first" literature is, in fact, the cornerstone of Kierkegaard's entire literary production. In Being and Existence in Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship, Elrod argues that Kierkegaard's definition of the self in The Sickness Unto Death is the same as his definition of the self in the work which describes the ethical sphere of existence, the second volume of Either/Or, (Elrod a 33-37, 53-65) and that the ethical definition of the self is therefore not superseded in the religious spheres of existence. The religious spheres, according to Elrod, supplement the ethical definition of the self but they are not in conflict with it. (Elrod a 142, 164-165) In this assessment, Elrod is in agreement both with Mark Taylor in the work referred to above and with George J. Stack in his Kierkegaard's Existential Ethics. Our interpretation, in contrast, shows that the ethical definition of the self collapses under the weight of its own contradictions and that it does so precisely to the extent that the ethical commitment to absolute choice fails to overcome the levelling of the present age. In other words, by taking the levelling of the present age as the fundamental problem which Kierkegaard's work addresses, we demonstrate that each of

the distinct spheres of existence is, in fact, distinct and, precisely insofar as we demonstrate this, we demonstrate that Kierkegaard's literature is not two literatures but, is rather, one coherent, systematic literature from beginning to end.

Having discussed two works representative of the two periods of Kierkegaard interpretation at some length, we are in a position to recognize both how far the interpretation of Kierkegaard's works has come and how far it still has to go. Elrod's work and the more thematic works mentioned above are obviously superior to the works of the first period of Kierkegaard scholarship in English. Elrod does problematize issues in Kierkegaard and he does manage to make each of the two distinct literatures which he claims to discuss relatively coherent and systematic. And yet, as we can see, the two periods do share some fundamental characteristics. Neither of them defines the problem which Kierkegaard's work addresses in such a way as to demonstrate the coherence and systematic unity of Kierkegaard's thought as a whole. Neither of them shows how Kierkegaard's analysis of the self is related to the problem which his work addresses. Neither of them shows how Kierkegaard's proposed solution to the problem he addresses, Religiousness B, is different from Religiousness

A. In the chapters which follow, we will attempt to accomplish all of these tasks and, in so doing, to show how Kierkegaard's work addresses fundamental issues in our individual lives and in the life of our culture.

CHAPTER I:
MODERN CULTURE

The Present Age is Kierkegaard's analysis of the problem of modern culture. All of Kierkegaard's works assume the existence of the problem and most make at least passing reference to it. Some, such as the Concluding Unscientific Postscript or the Attack Upon Christendom, argue that particular modern theories and practices-- in the cases of these books, modern philosophy and modern Christianity-- are symptoms of the problem. But only The Present Age diagnoses the disease which the symptoms declare.

1

Kierkegaard's diagnosis of the problem of the present age begins with the assertion that the present age has undermined the traditional relationships of Western culture. In some striking passages of The Present Age, Kierkegaard describes the state of traditional relationships in the present age:

A subject no longer freely honours his king or is angered at his ambition. To be a subject has come to mean something quite different; it means to be a third party. The subject ceases to have a position within the relationship; he has no direct relation to the king but simply becomes an observer and deliberately works out the problem; i.e. the relation of a subject to his king.... A father no longer curses his son in anger, using all his parental authority, nor does a son defy his father, a conflict which might end in the inwardness of forgiveness; on the contrary, their relationship is irreproachable, for it is really in process of ceasing to exist, since they are no longer related to one another within the relationship; in fact it has become a problem in which the two partners observe each other as in a game, instead of having any relation to each other, and they note down each other's remarks instead of showing a firm devotion.... A disobedient youth is no longer in fear of his schoolmaster-- the relation is rather one of indifference in which schoolmaster and pupil discuss how a good school should be run. To go to school no longer means to be in fear of the master, or merely to learn, but rather implies being interested in the problem of education. (PA 44-45)

But Kierkegaard not only describes the problem of

modern relationships. He also claims that the use of a term like "relationships" to describe the problem is itself a symptom of the problem:

More and more people renounce the quiet and modest tasks of life, that are so important and pleasing to God, in order to achieve something greater; in order to think over the relationships of life in a higher relationship till in the end the whole generation has become a representation, who represent...it is difficult to say who; and who think about these relationships...for whose sake it is not easy to discover. (PA 45)

What, then, is the problem of the present age and why can the very terms which describe it themselves be problematic? We can begin to understand the problem of the present age if we understand Kierkegaard's contrast between the present age and a revolutionary age. In a revolutionary age, people overthrow one set of institutions and put another set of institutions in its place. Anger at the ambition of kings, defiance of fathers, disobedience to schoolmasters are the sources of new political, familial and educational institutions. In the present age, in contrast, people do not overthrow the traditional relationships and put new relationships in their place. Instead, they leave the traditional relationships in place but refuse to commit themselves to them. As Kierkegaard says, "...the relation is rather one of indifference..." Thus,

A passionate tumultuous age will overthrow everything, pull everything down; but a revolutionary age, that is at the same time

reflective and passionless, transforms that expression of strength into a feat of dialectics: it leaves everything standing but cunningly empties it of significance. Instead of culminating in a rebellion it reduces the inward reality of all relationships to a reflective tension which leaves everything standing but makes the whole of life ambiguous: so that everything continues to exist factually whilst by a dialectical deceit, privatissime, it supplies a secret interpretation-- that it does not exist.
(PA 42-43)

Kierkegaard's contrast between a revolutionary age and the present age introduces the two terms which structure the argument not only of The Present Age but of Kierkegaard's work as a whole. The difference between a revolutionary age and the present age is the difference between passion and reflection. The definitions of each of these terms will become clear as we interpret Kierkegaard's work as a whole in the light of his analysis of the problem of the present age. At this point, it is enough to say that "passion" always connotes commitment and that "reflection" always connotes detachment. Thus, people in a revolutionary age have passion because they are committed to overthrowing one set of institutions and putting another set in its place. People in the present age substitute reflection for passion-- they observe themselves in their "relationships" and discuss the problems in their "relationships" instead of committing themselves to them. Thus, "...[the relation] has become a problem in which the two partners observe each other as in a game..."

Kierkegaard's contrast of passionate commitment and reflective detachment allows him to introduce another

concept which structures the argument of his work as a whole. Kierkegaard contrasts "the qualitative differentiating power of passion" with the "ambiguity [which] enters into life when the qualitative distinctions are weakened by a gnawing reflection" (PA 43). The problem of the present age, in other words, is that it weakens qualitative distinctions. We can understand why the weakening of qualitative distinctions is a problem if we examine an example of it. All of the traditional relationships which Kierkegaard has named-- kings and subjects, fathers and sons, teachers and students-- are examples of what he means by "qualitative distinctions". If we examine the example of the relationship between teachers and students, we can understand why the weakening of qualitative distinctions is a problem.

In the traditional relationship between teacher and student, the difference between teacher and student is not simply a quantitative difference. The teacher not only knows more than the student; he knows the difference between the kinds of things which it is important to know and the kinds of things which it is not important to know. In other words, he is able to make a distinction between those things which make a difference for knowledge and those things which do not. This distinction between the kinds of things which are known rather than merely between the number of things which are known is what makes the difference between teacher and student a qualitative and

not merely a quantitative difference.

But what is the source of this difference? The source of the difference between teacher and student in the traditional relationship is that the practices which define what it is to be a teacher themselves express a set of qualitative distinctions. In committing himself to these practices, the teacher commits himself to these distinctions. Thus, if being a teacher means teaching the classics of the tradition, in committing himself to the teaching of these classics, the teacher comes to know and to represent the difference between important books and trivial ones. The student, in apprenticing himself to the teacher, learns the classics and, in so doing, learns the difference between important books and trivial books.

If present age reflection weakens qualitative distinctions, then, present age reflection creates a situation in which the difference between important books and trivial books makes no difference either to teachers or to their students. They are equally indifferent to all books. And, if this is the case, we can understand why Kierkegaard calls the reflective weakening of qualitative distinctions "levelling". If there are no significant differences between things-- between important and unimportant books, in the case of the difference between teachers and students; between mature and immature character, in the case of fathers and sons, and so on-- everything is on an absolutely equal level. All

significant differences have been levelled.

But if all significant differences have been levelled, we can see why the problem of the present age is such a serious one. If the difference between knowledge and ignorance or maturity and immaturity makes no difference to me, I will not become an educated person or an authoritative parent. If nothing makes any difference to me, I will not become anything at all. The condition for the possibility of my becoming a differentiated individual, of having an individual identity, is that qualitative differences make a difference to me. In its reflective levelling of all qualitative distinctions, the present age undermines the possibility of becoming a differentiated individual, of having an individual identity.

2

Before we continue this analysis of the reflective levelling of the present age, however, it is necessary to raise a question about Kierkegaard's use of the term "reflection" up to this point. In claiming that "the qualitative distinctions are weakened by a gnawing reflection", Kierkegaard clearly is claiming that reflection is the cause of the problem of the present age. But the examples of the weakening of qualitative distinctions which Kierkegaard uses to support this claim instead seem to serve to call it into question. The causes of the weakening of the distinctions between kings and subjects, fathers and sons and teachers and students, as well as of the weakening of the two other distinctions which Kierkegaard mentions--objects of admiration and admirers and men and women-- seem to be much more concrete than reflection. And this seems to be the case because the distinctions which Kierkegaard has described are not simply and solely qualitative but are qualitative distinctions of a particular type.

Of what type are these distinctions? All of them share two fundamental characteristics-- they are social and they are hierarchical. To say that they are social is to

say that the distinction between fathers and sons, teachers and students, etc., is a distinction between social roles. To be defined by one of these roles is to be socially defined rather than self-defined and to be defined as a member of a social class or group rather than as an individual. To say that these distinctions are hierarchical is to say that the two parties to the relationship do not have equal importance.

But if both of these characterizations of the type of qualitative distinctions Kierkegaard has described are correct, the causes of the weakening of these distinctions appear to be much less abstract than Kierkegaard has indicated. It seems at least plausible to argue that aspirations for individuality and equality, and not reflection, inspire the weakening of the social, hierarchical distinctions which Kierkegaard has described.

The aspiration for individuality, as it applies to the situation of the weakening of social, hierarchical qualitative distinctions, means that, rather than receiving their identities from socially defined roles, individuals want to be self-defining and that they seek their definition in that which distinguishes them as individuals rather than in that which defines them as members of a group.

The aspiration for equality, as it applies to his situation, means that all of these self-defining individuals want to be regarded as equals. In opposition

to the hierarchical order, the aspiration for equality claims that difference or distinction between individuals does not necessarily mean that some individuals are superior to others. Rather than being mutually exclusive, in other words, difference and equality are mutually reinforcing.

But if the aspirations for individuality and equality-- and not reflection-- were the causes of the weakening of the social, hierarchical qualitative distinctions, how would this affect Kierkegaard's description of the reflective quality of modern relationships? Interestingly enough, it would change nothing in the description of those relationships but simply would make reflection the consequence instead of the cause of the weakening of the traditional relationships. And while this may appear to be a change of no significant import, it in fact has serious-- and not at all harmful-- consequences for Kierkegaard's argument. For, surprisingly enough, not describing reflection as the cause of the weakening of the social, hierarchical qualitative distinctions supports and confirms all of Kierkegaard's other descriptions of the nature of reflection. Not only does it support and confirm them-- it actually makes them plausible and believable. It demystifies-- and therefore deepens-- Kierkegaard's account of the nature of reflection. But in order to see this, we first have to see-- through giving an account which Kierkegaard himself

does not give-- just how the aspirations for individuality and equality undermine the traditional relationships.

In order to answer the question of how the aspirations for individuality and equality undermine the traditional relationships it is first necessary to ask how the traditional relationships are non-individual and inegalitarian. We have answered the first of these questions satisfactorily for our present purpose by showing how the traditional relationships provide a social, rather than an individual, definition both in the sense that the individual is socially defined rather than self-defined and in the sense that he is defined as a member of a class or group rather than as an individual. But our account of how the traditional relationships are hierarchical must be spelled out in more detail in order to show the specific way in which these relationships of superior and subordinate are inegalitarian.

How, then, are the traditional relationships founded upon a belief in the significance of inequalities between individuals? In the first place, finite, quantitative differences between individuals play a significant part in determining the qualifications for the superior roles. We call these differences finite because they involve determinate qualities of individuals such as lineage (in the case of kings and subjects), gender (in the case of men

and women), intelligence (in the case of teachers and students) or unusual skill or talent (in the case of objects of admiration and admirers). We call these differences quantitative because individuals possess these qualities in greater or lesser amounts-- or, in the cases of lineage and gender, totally or not at all. In other words, the particular qualities which qualify individuals for the superior roles are distributed unequally. Therefore, some individuals are able to attain the superior positions while others are not.

The inequality of this situation is reinforced by the fact that the differences between individuals which qualify or disqualify them for the superior positions are not only finite and quantitative differences but are also what we might call necessary differences. They are necessary both in the sense that they determine the identity of the individual-- the individual would not be this individual without this particular gender, these particular talents, etc.-- and in the sense that they limit the possibility of individual self-determination-- the individual did not choose his gender, his talents, etc., and he can do little to alter them. Both types of necessity can set serious constraints upon the possibilities of attaining superior positions.

But it is precisely the fact that neither of the aforementioned types of necessity is necessity in the strongest sense of the term that provokes the judgement

that the traditional relationships are not only inegalitarian but are unjustly so. The fact that an individual has particular qualities which determine his identity as this particular individual and that these particular qualities are not determined by him does not mean that he has to have had these qualities and that he has to have had this identity. Short of positing some sort of predestination from eternity, we cannot help but see these facts as matters of temporal circumstance-- this individual happened to be born with these particular qualities and thus happens to have this particular identity but he could have been born with different qualities and thus could have had a different identity. But if this is the case, individuals qualify for the superior roles not by virtue of any sort of merit in the most traditional sense of the term-- i.e. by virtue of their position in relation to a theodicy which justly distributes qualities among individuals-- but simply on the basis of historical circumstance.

If in the preceeding description of the inequities which obtain in the traditional relationships is correct, the obvious question which follows is how these inequities could be corrected. The obvious answer which follows is not that the finite qualities of individuals could be changed so that any individuals who desired them could have

the qualities which would qualify them for the superior roles. The whole point of describing these finite qualities as necessary was to indicate that they cannot be changed-- or, at the very least, changed radically. If they could, the problem of inequality in the traditional relationships would not exist. But if it is impossible to make the individuals who are parties to the traditional relationships equal, the only remaining alternative would seem to be to make the relationships themselves equal. If, to take one of our previous examples, knowing the difference between what it is and what it is not important to know is superior to not knowing the difference, the individual with the intelligence to know the difference is superior to the individual without the intelligence to do so. Since the latter individual cannot acquire the intelligence to know the difference, the only way to make him the equal of the former individual is to make knowing and not knowing the difference between what it is and is not important to know of equal importance. Having or not having the intelligence to know this difference than will not evoke a judgement of superior or inferior. Rather, the individuals so described will be judged as different but equal.

But, on closer inspection, this solution to the problem of inequality in the traditional relationships merely seems to substitute a new problem for the old one. If all social roles are equally important, individuals seem

to have no motivation for identifying themselves with one role rather than another. Equality seems to have been bought at the price of individual commitment to a particular social role.

This objection fails, however, when we see that it does not describe the situation or state the issue quite correctly. While it is true that there are no social standards for determining which roles are important and which are unimportant, it does not follow that there are not individual standards for making this determination. Indeed, the very individual qualities which motivate the attempt to make the traditional relationships equal seem to provide the basis for distinguishing between those roles which make a difference to an individual and those which do not. Egalitarianism, in other words, leads logically to a kind of individualism-- to the principle that it is up to the individual to determine which roles make a difference to him on the basis of his individual qualities.

But this type of individualism-- one which still assumes that the individual is defined by a social role but which wants that role to be individually chosen rather than socially imposed and which believes that the choice of a social role can be based upon the qualities which differentiate individuals from each other-- rests upon two important, and as yet unjustified, assumptions. First, it assumes that, once the traditional roles have been made equal in order to account for individual differences, there

still will be differentiated roles for individuals to choose. Second, it assumes that once the traditional roles have been made equal in order to account for individual differences, there still will be individual differences upon which to base the choice.

We have already seen how different roles are established under the traditional arrangements. There are teachers because there is a social definition of what it is important to know which it is the role of teachers to represent. In representing this definition, teachers give expression to the difference between what it is important and what it is unimportant to know. But if, under the egalitarian arrangements, having the ability to be a teacher and not having the ability-- knowing the difference between what it is important to know and what it is unimportant to know and not knowing the difference-- are equally important, this amounts to saying that there is no difference between what it is important and what it is unimportant to know. But if this is the case, there can be no role for those who represent the difference and thus there can be no teachers.

Here a more radical type of individualism than the type we have just described begins to assert its claims. Obviously, individuals cannot choose the social roles which are important to them if there are no social roles to choose. Thus, the type of individualism which limits itself to the principle that it is up to the individual to

decide which role to identify himself with and to do so on the basis of his differentiating qualities is inadequate in this situation. The type of individualism which claims to be adequate therefore must assert a much more radical principle-- that, confronted with a situation in which they cannot choose roles, individuals can create them and that they can create them on the same basis upon which, under the more limited type of individualism, they would have chosen them-- namely, their individual differentiating qualities. Individuals create the roles which allow them to express the qualities which differentiate them as individuals.

But it is precisely with this claim that the combined aspirations for equality and individuality finally seem to run aground and to result not only in the loss of all traditional qualitative distinctions but in the impossibility of establishing new ones. Once again, a comparison with the traditional arrangements is instructive. If qualitatively distinct roles exist, it is possible to identify individuals as having or not having the qualifications for them. Indeed, individuals are differentiated qualitatively as individuals and are differentiated qualitatively from each other precisely on this basis. But if no qualitatively distinct roles exist, so that the role for which an individual qualifies must be created by his qualifications themselves, it is difficult to understand how his finite qualities could be identified

as qualifications in the first place. It seems to belong to the definition of a qualification to be a qualification for something, but it is precisely this something-- a qualitatively distinct role-- which does not exist.

But even to raise this objection it is necessary to make the prior assumption that the finite qualities of individuals which could become qualifications can, in fact, be identified as finite qualities in the first place. But how can an individual be identified, for example, as intelligent or unintelligent if there is no distinction between the proper and improper objects of intelligence? What counts as intelligence? Indeed, why should intelligence be a quality at all? What determines what can and cannot count as a quality?

The upshot of all of this is that, in the absence of a set of social definitions which establish qualitatively distinct roles, there are no qualitatively distinct individuals who could establish them. Rather, undifferentiated individuals-- individuals without qualities-- who can be identified as individuals only in the sense that they are numerically distinct from each other, face an undifferentiated world.

Egalitarianism and individualism do have one last move available to them, however. They can attempt to arrive at a definition of individual identity which makes no reference to social roles or to the finite qualities that qualify individuals for them. But it is unclear how this

kind of definition can be an individual definition if it abstracts from individual qualities. Indeed, definitions of this type - of a kind of moral or spiritual character which can be described without reference to any particular person or any particular situation - always seem to be so abstract as to be meaningless.

If the preceding arguments are correct, they demonstrate that the aspirations for individuality and equality are responsible for the weakening of the social, hierarchical qualitative distinctions which Kierkegaard has described. Furthermore, from these arguments it is relatively easy to see why reflection is the natural result of the weakening of these distinctions by individualism and egalitarianism. If no distinctions between roles are provided by a social definition of these roles and if, in the absence of a social definition, there is no individual definition, there are no relationships to which individuals can be parties and they are left with no alternative but to become third parties. Kierkegaard's description of the relationships between fathers and sons, teachers and students, etc., perfectly describes this situation. But now, instead of invoking a reflective opposition to qualitative distinctions as an explanatory power, without ever saying what motivates this reflection, we now have a motive-- namely, the inability of social, hierarchical qualitative distinctions to do justice to, and therefore to withstand the combined onslaught of, individualism and egalitarianism.

3

Having seen how individualism and egalitarianism are the causes of the reflective levelling of the present age, we are in a position to justify what otherwise sounds like a complete mystification-- namely, Kierkegaard's reference to the levelling process as an "abstract power" which "in modern times, corresponds, in reflection, to fate in antiquity". (PA 52) If our account of the cause of levelling is correct, this statement cannot mean what it appears to mean on the surface-- and which there seems to be no good reason to believe-- namely, that levelling is caused by a kind of reflection which operates independently of the intentions of individuals and which is imposed upon individuals like fate. But if it does not mean this, what does it mean? In order to answer this question, we must turn to the remarks which are meant to support Kierkegaard's statement, show how these remarks can be interpreted in the light of our explanation of the way in which individualism and egalitarianism level qualitative distinctions and show how this interpretation is not only more plausible than the obvious one but also, hopefully, more illuminating of the situation which Kierkegaard is attempting to describe.

Introducing the section of The Present Age which directly follows his description of the levelling process, Kierkegaard states:

Throughout many changes the tendency in modern times has remained a levelling one. These changes themselves have not, however, all of them, been levelling, for they are none of them abstract enough, each having a certain concrete reality. To some extent it is true that the levelling process goes on when one great man attacks another, so that both are weakened, or when one is neutralized by the other, or when an association of people, in themselves weak, grow stronger than the eminent. Levelling can also be accomplished by one particular caste, e.g. the clergy, the bourgeois, the peasants, by the people themselves. But all that is only the first movement of an abstract power within the concreteness of individuality. (PA 59)

The attacks on the representatives of qualitative distinctions which Kierkegaard describes in this passage are attacks which are made in the name of individuality and equality. Each time a specific distinction falls, it falls because of the concrete inequalities it promotes and by the hands of or in the interests of the concrete individuals it excludes. This is what it means to say that each of these changes has "a certain concrete reality" and takes place "within the concreteness of individuality".

Why, then, is levelling not simply the sum total of all of these concrete changes? Why does Kierkegaard insist that "they are none of them abstract enough" to be levelling, that "all that is only the first movement of an

abstract power within the concreteness of individuality"?

First of all, what begins "within the concreteness of individuality" does not end there. The result of the drives for individuality and equality is not different but equal roles which have been differentiated by different but equal individuals but no roles and no individuals-- in other words, abstraction. Nevertheless, this abstraction could be just the sum total of all of the individual acts of levelling. When Kierkegaard refers to levelling as an abstract power, however, he means that it is something over and above these concrete acts. What does this mean?

It means that, while each concrete act of levelling intends a situation of individual differentiation, the situation which results is exactly the opposite. This situation is not, therefore, the sum total of all of the concrete intentions toward individuality and equality but bears no relation to any of these intentions except that it is the direct opposite of them. But this is not because reflection is a force operating independently of the intentions of individuals but because the consequences of the actions of individuals bear no necessary relation to the intentions of those actions.

Levelling, then, is an abstract power in the sense that its power does not derive directly from the concrete intentions of individuals. The weakening of qualitative distinctions is an activity that takes place in spite of and not because of the concrete intentions of individuals

for qualitative distinctions which are individual and egalitarian.

But if individuals are not directly responsible for levelling, they are also unable to resist levelling once they come to realize that it is the unintended result of their desires for individuality and equality:

No single individual (I mean no outstanding individual-- in the sense of leadership and conceived according to the dialectical category 'fate') will be able to arrest the abstract process of levelling, for it is negatively something higher, and the age of chivalry is gone. No society or association can arrest that abstract power, simply because an association is itself in the service of the levelling process. Not even the individuality of the different nationalities can arrest it, for on a higher plane the abstract process of levelling is a negative representation of humanity pure and unalloyed. The abstract levelling process, that self-combustion of the human race, produced by the friction which arises when the individual ceases to exist as singled out by religion, is bound to continue, like a trade wind, and consume everything. (PA 55-56)

It is the irresistible power of levelling which evokes the comparison of levelling with fate. But just as Kierkegaard's reference to levelling as an "abstract power" is not intended in any mythological sense, neither is his reference to levelling as fate. This can be confirmed by spelling out the implications of the examples given in the passage above.

"No single individual will be able to resist the abstract process of levelling" because to be a single individual is to have finite differentiating qualities and a differentiated role. Such differentiations, as we have

seen, are only possible if a definition establishes distinct roles and determines what finite differentiating qualities count as qualifications for these roles. But all of the definitions which accomplish this task are social and hierarchical. Thus, any individual who invokes these definitions in order to resist present age levelling necessarily will be seen as anti-individualist and anti-egalitarian and as standing for the social, hierarchical distinctions at the expense of individuality and equality. Indeed, such an individual will set himself up to be levelled in particular and will further the levelling process in general for, precisely by invoking the social, hierarchical distinctions, he raises them to a level of consciousness where they can be seen clearly enough to be attacked.

To state the matter slightly differently, levelling is like fate because the very terms which an individual uses to resist the levelling process are dictated by the process itself. The concept of an individual which resistance employs is the very same concept which individualism and egalitarianism employ in their attack upon the social hierarchies. In this sense, the levelling process is a closed system whose end is contained in its beginning. In this sense, it is like fate.

But why is the resistance to levelling necessarily parasitic upon the concepts which promote levelling? We can answer this question if we see why an attempt to appeal

above individuals to associations or nations as the proper vehicles of resistance cannot succeed. Under the traditional arrangements, associations, like individuals, are representatives of qualitative distinctions. Political associations represent political distinctions, educational associations represent educational distinctions, and so on. But if all of these distinctions are social and hierarchical, present age associations cannot represent them. If associations cannot represent qualitative distinctions, they can only represent individuals. But when there are no qualitative distinctions, there are no individuals. Present age associations, therefore, can only represent an attempt to find strength in numbers. But this means that levelling-- which is precisely the reduction of the qualitative differences between individuals to numerical differences-- is the foreordained victor in the struggle.

The argument about the inability of the individuality of the different nationalities to resist the levelling process is different but related. The distinctions between different nations are, at least in part, distinctions between different definitions of what is important and what is unimportant. But these kinds of definitions, as we have seen, are social and hierarchical. Therefore, equal individuals are justified in resisting their claims. But, as soon as they do so, they begin to set the levelling process in motion.

In other words, once equal individuals are taken as the most basic unit of analysis, every other unit-- associations, nations, etc.-- can be analyzed in terms of them. Levelling is the inevitable result of this situation. But the process does not work in the other direction. While associations and nations can be deconstructed into equal individuals, equal individuals cannot be built up into associations and nations. Levelling is irreversible and so is like fate.

But the power of levelling is not, finally, simply that it forces individuals to define themselves in terms which further the levelling process in spite of their own intentions. Levelling also has the power to prevent individual intentions from ever arising in the first place. For as the finite, differentiating qualities of individuals progressively are raised to the level of consciousness and are levelled, there is less and less of a basis from which individuals can even intend to resist. Levelling as an abstract power is the unintended consequence of the intentions of concrete individuals. Levelling as fate actively destroys individuals and their intentions.

To sum up the immediately preceding argument: Kierkegaard's assertion that levelling is an "abstract power" which corresponds "in reflection, to fate in

antiquity" does not mean that reflection is an autonomous power which operates independently of individual intentions. To say that levelling is an abstract power is to say that the desires for individualism and equality lead to the loss of all concrete distinctions and that this loss runs counter to the concrete intentions of the individuals who are responsible for it. To say that levelling corresponds to fate is to say that the terms with which to resist levelling are dictated by it and that these terms actively undermine the basis for resistance. To identify levelling with reflection is to say that the loss of all concrete distinctions to abstraction makes every individual a third party and to identify reflection with fate is to say that third party status destroys the possibility of individual resistance.

With this argument, we have shown that all of Kierkegaard's remarks about the nature of reflection can be assimilated to our argument that the desires for individuality and equality are the causes of the levelling of the social, hierarchical qualitative distinctions. To conclude this argument, it is appropriate to point out that, with the acceptance of the premise that the desires for individuality and equality caused the present age, it is still possible to draw two different conclusions about the attitudes of the individuals involved toward the results of their intentions toward individuality and equality.

The first conclusion, which resonates well with Kierkegaard's use of the language of fate-- and, by extension, tragedy-- is that levelling is an instance of the tragic problem of unintended and unforeseen consequences. Individuals do not realize until it is too late that, in trying to level the hierarchical, social qualitative distinctions for the sake of individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions, they end up with no qualitative distinctions and with equal individuals who are equal and individual in a numerical sense only.

The second conclusion, which resonates well with Kierkegaard's use of the word "reflection" to describe the problem of the present age, is that the individuals involved in the levelling of the social, hierarchical qualitative distinctions are fully conscious of the fact that the loss of these distinctions means levelling. However, faced with the choice between non-egalitarian, non-individual qualitative distinctions-- of meaning at the expense of individuality and equality-- or meaningless individuality and equality, they choose the latter. They do so not out of some perverse nihilistic motives but out of a sense of rationality and justice-- out of the conviction, in other words, that levelling is preferable to the illusion fostered by the social hierarchies that the finite qualities of individuals have some inherent significance and to the manipulation of this illusion for the sake of the power of some and the powerlessness of

others.

The present age, then, is the inevitable result of the conflict between the aspirations for individuality and equality, on the one hand, and the meaning sustained by qualitative distinctions on the other. This result is either unforeseen, as in the case of tragedy, or foreseen but accepted as the price of reason and justice. In either case, it is inevitable.

Or is it? Suppose that there were a way to have both individuality and equality and qualitative distinctions. Suppose, in other words, that there were qualitative distinctions which were not social and hierarchical; that qualitative distinctions were not social and hierarchical by definition. In that case, there would be no inevitable conflict between the desires for individuality and equality and qualitative distinctions and the present age would therefore not be the result of this inevitable conflict.

At first, it might seem possible to argue that the present age could still be a tragedy, if the individuals who level the social, hierarchical distinctions are unaware of the fact that individual, egalitarian distinctions can be substituted for them; if they are unaware of the fact that there is no inevitable conflict between the desires for individuality and equality and qualitative distinctions. But to make the case for tragedy, we have to ask why individuals are not aware of the possibility of distinctions which are individual and egalitarian. If they

cannot be aware of this possibility, the situation is not tragic because the distinctions cannot exist. If, on the other hand, their lack of awareness is purely coincidental, the situation can be corrected and the levelling of the present age overcome with the proper knowledge.

But if it is a matter of proper knowledge, the case against tragedy and for rationality-- the case that the individuals who engage in levelling are aware that there is a conflict between individuality and equality and qualitative distinctions but are willing to accept meaninglessness for the sake of reason and justice-- cannot be correct either. For if they were really aware and fully rational, these individuals would see that there is no conflict between reason and qualitative distinctions.

If there is no conflict between individuality and equality and qualitative distinctions, in other words, neither the lack of knowledge that there is no conflict-- the tragic story-- nor the knowledge that there is a conflict-- the rational story-- are able to account for the ongoing existence of the present age. What, then, could account for it? If individuals are unaware of the fact that there is no inevitable conflict between individualism and equality and qualitative distinctions and this lack of awareness is not due to their inability to know this or to the chance that they have not been informed-- if this knowledge is neither necessarily nor contingently inaccessible-- to what is it due?

The only remaining possibility is that individuals do not want to be aware of the fact that there is no conflict, that they have some interest in remaining unaware of it and therefore resist becoming aware of it. But what is the source of this interest and this resistance? If we are not going to posit the existence of an irreducible drive towards meaninglessness, we must assume that the interest in meaning conflicts with some other interest. We have just seen that it does not conflict with the interest in individuality and equality. If individuals actively resist the knowledge of meaningful distinctions, then, it seems plausible to assume that there is a conflict between meaning and knowledge or meaning and reflection. Reflection must have some interest in covering up the possibility of individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions.

But if this is the case, the present age is no longer a tragedy, since individuals are at least potentially aware of the possibility of individual egalitarian qualitative distinctions. The present age is no longer a rational acceptance of a life without the illusion of meaning since the notion that individuality and equality and meaning are incompatible is itself an illusion. And the present age is not caused by the aspirations for individuality and equality but by reflection. Reflection is the cause of the present age.

4

Obviously, the conclusion that reflection is the cause of the present age turns our whole story around. Nevertheless, it is absolutely imperative to understand the preceding argument that the aspirations for individuality and equality cause the present age in order to appreciate the complexity of the turnaround. For if the traditional qualitative distinctions are non-individual and inegalitarian, as we have argued, Kierkegaard's support for qualitative distinctions need not be support for these particular qualitative distinctions. At the same time, the fact that these distinctions are non-individual and inegalitarian only says that they could have been levelled by individualism and egalitarianism, not that they actually were. Thus, Kierkegaard can individualism and egalitarianism while claiming that the actual cause of levelling is the interest of reflection in covering up the possibility of the existence of individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions.

To make this case, Kierkegaard obviously has to show three things-- that individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions can, in fact, exist; that reflection has an interest in covering up this possibility; and that the

present age can be understood as covering up this possibility. The first two points will be suggested but not defended in the remainder of The Present Age. Kierkegaard will name the individual, egalitarian distinctions but he will not show how they can come into existence. It will take the remainder of his works to describe the failed and successful attempts at establishing these distinctions. And only when we see what Kierkegaard thinks counts as a successful attempt to establish these distinctions will we see why reflection has an interest in resisting them. What Kierkegaard does do in The Present Age, however, is show how the activity of the present age can be understood as covering up the possibility of individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions. It is to this task that the remainder of The Present Age is devoted.

But if we do not yet know what the individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions are or how they come into existence, it is important to conclude this section-- as Kierkegaard concludes this section of The Present Age-- with some actual evidence for the claim we have just made that Kierkegaard's interests are, in fact, individual and egalitarian and that he supports the levelling of the social hierarchies on this basis.

The crucial phase which signals the appearance of this issue arise in the last passage we quoted, in which Kierkegaard claims that "the abstract levelling process"

which cannot be arrested by individuals, associations, societies or nations but "is bound to continue" is "produced by the friction which arises when the individual ceases to exist as singled out by religion." Only after we have seen how each of the spheres of existence-- the aesthetic, the ethical, Religiousness A and Religiousness B-- attempts to solve the problem of the present age will we be able to see why Kierkegaard claims that the solution to the problem must be religious. Only then will we be able to see in what sense the solution is individual and egalitarian. All that it is important to note here is Kierkegaard's insistence that the solution will be individual and egalitarian. That it will be individual Kierkegaard asserts immediately after his assertion that the abstract levelling process "is bound to continue, like a trade wind, and consume everything":

But through it each individual for himself may receive once more a religious education and, in the highest sense, will be helped by the examen rigorosum of the levelling process to an essentially religious attitude. For the younger men who, however strongly they personally may cling to what they admire as eminent, realize from the beginning that the levelling process is evil in both the selfish individual and in the selfish generation, but that it can also, if they desire it honestly and before God, become the starting point for the highest life-- for them it will indeed be an education to live in the age of levelling. Their age will, in the very highest sense, develop them religiously and at the same time educate them aesthetically and intellectually, because in this way the comic will receive its absolute expression. The highest form of the comic arises precisely when the individual comes directly under the infinite abstraction of 'pure humanity', without any of those intermediary qualifications which temper

the humour of man's position and strengthen its pathos, without any of the concrete particulars of organization which the levelling process destroys. But that again is only another expression of the fact that man's only salvation lies in the reality of religion for each individual. (PA 56)

That the solution will be egalitarian Kierkegaard asserts in the immediately succeeding passages:

The abstract principle of levelling...like the biting east wind, has no personal relation to any individual but has only an abstract relationship which is the same for everyone. There, no hero suffers for others, or helps them; the taskmaster of all alike is the levelling process which itself takes on their education. And the man who learns most from the levelling and himself becomes greatest does not become an outstanding man or a hero-- that would only impede the levelling process, which is rigidly consistent to the end-- he himself prevents that from happening because he has understood the meaning of levelling; he becomes a man and nothing else, in the complete equalitarian sense. That is the idea of religion...for unless the individual learns in the reality of religion and before God to be content with himself, and learns instead of dominating others, to dominate himself, content as priest to be his own audience, and as author his own reader, if he will not learn to be satisfied with that as the highest, because it is the expression of the equality of all men before God and of our likeness to others, then he will not escape from reflection. (PA 57)

5.

How can the present age be interpreted as the attempt to cover up the possibility of individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions? In order to answer this question, we must examine an aspect of the present age which so far we have left unexamined. Up to this point, we have defined the present age in terms of the loss of qualitative distinctions and the loss of the social hierarchies which these distinctions maintain. But we have not discussed what takes the place of these qualitative distinctions and social hierarchies. The present age cannot be defined simply as the absence of qualitative distinctions and social hierarchies. Something comes in to fill the vacuum created by their absence. What takes the place of qualitative distinctions is the press or, more broadly, the media-- a term Kierkegaard no doubt would appreciate as a pun on the mediation or abrogation of qualitative distinctions. What takes the place of the social hierarchies is what Kierkegaard calls "the public".

In order to understand the meanings and functions of the press and the public and to understand how they can take the place of traditional qualitative distinctions and social hierarchies, it is helpful to return to a contrast

which Kierkegaard employed at the beginning of his characterization of the present age. When Kierkegaard tried to describe the specific way in which the present age abolished qualitative distinctions-- when he tried to illustrate the difference between abolishing them through passion and abolishing them through reflection-- he contrasted the present age and revolutionary ages. Revolutionary ages abolished one set of qualitative distinctions in the interest of another set while the present age abolished all qualitative distinctions in the interest of none. Now, when Kierkegaard tries to describe what the present age puts in the place of qualitative distinctions, he again employs the contrast between the present age and revolutionary ages.

But there is a further refinement in the contrast here. Earlier we noted that Kierkegaard's attribution of passion to revolutionary ages showed that his defense of qualitative distinctions was not an expression of conservatism; that his interest was not in the preservation of a traditional set of qualitative distinctions but in having some set as opposed to none. In his further refinement of the contrast between the present age and revolutionary ages, it becomes clear that what really attracts Kierkegaard to revolutionary ages is not the outcome of the struggle between traditional and revolutionary qualitative distinctions but the fact that there is a struggle. The importance of revolutionary ages

is that qualitative distinctions are at issue, that there is disagreement over the meanings of the distinctions which are held in common or there is competition among different sets of distinctions. There is, in more contemporary terms, a conflict of interpretations. And because nothing is settled, as it is in a traditional age or in the aftermath of a successful revolution, individuals are forced to commit themselves to-- to have passion for-- one set of qualitative distinctions or another. In this situation, even the decision to commit oneself to a traditional role-- father or son, teacher or student-- is not a passive acceptance of the status quo but an active commitment to the traditional qualitative distinctions and against the revolutionary ones.

Kierkegaard's amplified picture of revolutionary ages, then, is as follows: In the place of traditional qualitative distinctions which are accepted by all and whose meaning is accepted by all, there is a conflict about the meaning of the qualitative distinctions which are held by all or there is a conflict among different sets of qualitative distinctions. Instead of the social hierarchies as the concrete articulations of the meaning of the traditional qualitative distinctions, there are parties which represent different interpretations of the distinctions which are held in common or which represent different sets of distinctions. Finally, an element which has no place in the traditional picture enters in-- the

press. Once the meanings of qualitative distinctions can no longer be assumed to be known, shared and taken for granted, a party must have some way of making its interpretations known and of convincing others of them. The press fulfills this function. Each party has a newspaper which attempts to convince individuals to commit themselves to the interpretation of the issues which the party represents.

We have already seen that, at first glance, the present age and revolutionary ages appear to be similar insofar as both destroy traditional qualitative distinctions. We have also pointed out the deceptiveness of this appearance. The present age and revolutionary ages can also appear to be similar with respect to what they put in the place of the traditional distinctions. Once again, however, appearances are deceptive. In this instance, as well, the differences between the present age and revolutionary ages are far more pronounced than any of the similarities between them.

The difference between the present age and revolutionary ages is, as we have seen, that the latter attempt to substitute one set of qualitative distinctions for another while the former does away with qualitative distinctions all together. But if there are no qualitative distinctions, not only can there be no social hierarchies

to which individuals can be parties, there also can be no parties which represent interpretations of qualitative distinctions to which individuals can commit themselves. Therefore, there can be no press which represents the stands of the different parties because there are no parties to represent.

Nevertheless, the present age does have a press. Since there are no qualitative distinctions which are at issue, the press does not take stands on issues. Instead, it creates issues. But the issues it creates, because they are not qualitative distinctions which distinguish mutually exclusive stands which can be taken on them, are not the kinds of issues which can create different parties and which can differentiate individuals from each other by forcing them to identify with one party or the other. Rather, all individuals take a stand as an undifferentiated whole. The name of the whole which takes the stand is "the public" and the name of the stand is public opinion.

The difference between revolutionary ages and the present age can be summed up, then, as follows:

In times of passion and tumult and enthusiasm, even when a people desire to realize a fruitless idea and lay waste and destroy everything; even then there is no such thing as a public. There are parties and they are concrete. The Press, in times such as those, takes on a concrete character according to the division of parties.... The man who has no opinion of an event at the actual moment accepts the opinion of the majority, or, if he is quarrelsome, of the minority. But it must be remembered that both majority and minority are real people, and that is why the individual is assisted by adhering to them. A public, on the

contrary, is an abstraction.... Only when the sense of association in society is no longer strong enough to give life to concrete realities is the Press able to create that abstraction 'the public', consisting of unreal individuals who never are and never can be united in an actual situation or organization-- and yet are held together as a whole. (PA 60,61)

We will turn in a moment to the question of the kinds of issues which the press creates and the kinds of stands which the public takes on these issues. But the basic point to be made here, which Kierkegaard never states explicitly but which undergirds this whole section of The Present Age, is that the press and the public are mirror images of each other and are, as such, an illusion-- albeit, a very powerful one-- of reflection. The press is the illusion that something really is at issue for the present age and the public is the illusion that a stand is being taken on that which is at issue. The attractiveness of this illusion is that issues can exist and stands can be taken without anyone taking any responsibility or assuming any risk. The press does not claim to create the issues but simply to reflect what is at issue for the public. The public, meanwhile, is only conscious of itself as the public through the image of itself which the press reflects back to it. Thus, the public claims not to be taking stands on issues but simply to be reflecting back to the press stands which the press created in the first place.

But to call the symbiotic activities of the press and the public an illusion of reflection is not necessarily to condemn them. The illusion, as we have seen, is a response

to the loss of the qualitative distinctions which made parties, the press and individual commitments possible. Unfortunately, those same qualitative distinctions made social hierarchies not only possible but necessary, for all of those qualitative distinctions were non-individual and inegalitarian. If there is, in fact, an inevitable conflict between qualitative distinctions and individuality and equality, it is difficult to see why maintaining an illusion of meaning is any worse than facing up to the essential meaninglessness of the situation. Indeed, it might be defended as making some sort of activity-- namely, the creation of illusions-- possible and therefore as allowing people to do something besides simply reflect upon the meaninglessness of their condition.

This is the point, of course, at which our description of the activities of the press and the public connects back up with the issue we raised at the end of the last section. If there is an inevitable conflict between individualism and egalitarianism and qualitative distinctions, it is difficult to condemn the illusion of meaning which an individualistic, egalitarian society puts in the place of qualitative distinctions and social hierarchies. Suppose, however, that there is no inevitable conflict between individualism and egalitarianism and qualitative distinctions. Suppose, therefore, that the activities of the press and the public are not attempts to deal with this inevitable conflict in the most adequate way

possible but are rather, attempts to cover up the fact that no conflict exists. Suppose, in other words, that the activities of the press and the public constitute an active covering up of the possibility of individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions. And, finally, suppose that the abstraction and inadequacy of our description, to this point, of what the press and the public actually are and do can be attributed to the fact that we have left out of the description the one element which is most crucial to it--an account, namely, of the individual, egalitarian distinctions which the press and the public cover up.

In order to support this line of argument, Kierkegaard must do two things-- he must name the individual, egalitarian distinctions and give some indication of how they are qualitative and, therefore, meaningful; and he must show that the activities of the press and the public best can be explained as covering up these distinctions. In the most important and most difficult section of The Present Age, Kierkegaard sets out to accomplish precisely these tasks. There he makes it clear that the distinctions he wishes to defend are not the distinctions between fathers and sons, teachers and students, etc., or between radicals and reactionaries, but are, rather, the distinctions between talk and silence, content and form, revelation and concealment and objectivity and subjectivity. The press creates the kinds of issues which collapse the distinction between talk and silence in the

talkativeness of the public, which collapse the distinction between revelation and concealment in the superficiality of the public, and so on. In order to understand what this means and why it is so, it is necessary to proceed to a close reading of Kierkegaard's text. Only by way of such a reading will we be able to see what each of these distinctions means, what their collapse means and what the roles of the press and the public are in collapsing these distinctions.

But before we proceed to this discussion, it is necessary to add one cautionary note. All of Kierkegaard's works which we will discuss in the remaining chapters are concerned with the attempts to establish the aforementioned distinctions. Until we have discussed these attempts, any discussion of these distinctions necessarily will be incomplete and possibly will be confusing. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard's only explicit discussion of these distinctions takes places in The Present Age. Without some discussion of them here, it will be impossible to understand just what the various attempts at solutions to the problem of the present age are attempting to do. Thus, we will discuss these distinctions here but the discussion will both be expanded and made more precise in the remaining chapters.

6

The first qualitative distinction which the present age collapses is the distinction between talk and silence:

What is talkativeness? It is the result of doing away with the vital distinction between talking and keeping silent. (PA 69)

What does it mean to collapse this distinction? It means that people make no distinction between the kinds of subjects they do and do not talk about. They talk about everything. But if every kind of subject is an appropriate subject for talk, there is no distinction between appropriate and inappropriate subjects. To talk about everything is to talk about nothing:

Where mere scope is concerned, talkativeness wins the day, it jabbers on incessantly about everything and nothing. (PA 69)

To maintain the distinction between talk and silence, on the other hand, is to make a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate subjects of talk:

But some one who can really talk, because he knows how to remain silent, will not talk about a variety of things but about one thing only, and he will know when to talk and when to remain silent. (PA 69)

And, in making a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate subjects of talk, the individual resembles a

revolutionary age:

In a passionate age great events (for they correspond to each other) give people something to talk about. Talkativeness, on the contrary, has, in quite another sense, plenty to talk about. And when the event is over, and silence follows, there is still something to remember and to think about while one remains silent. But talkativeness is afraid of the silence which reveals its emptiness. (PA 69)

But this comparison of the individual who maintains the distinction between talk and silence to a revolutionary age simply raises in more specific form the question with which we concluded the previous section. If there are no revolutionary events which are appropriate subjects of talk, what are the appropriate subjects of talk in the present age? To say simply that an individual "will not talk about a variety of things but about one thing only" is to surrender to the present age in the act of opposing it, for it turns a qualitative distinction into a quantitative one. Maintaining the distinction between talk and silence becomes talking about one thing and not about many things rather than talking about appropriate subjects and not about inappropriate subjects.

But Kierkegaard immediately makes it clear that the distinction between talk and silence is not a quantitative distinction. He does so by showing how the qualitative distinction between talk and silence is exemplified in artistic production:

The ideal perfection of his talk and of his production will correspond to his silence, and the absolute expression of that silence will be

that the ideal will include the qualitatively opposite possibility.... For example, if the man who is moved to write by suffering is really initiated into the realm of ideals, he will reproduce the happiness as well as the suffering of his experience with the same affection. The condition of his attaining this ideal is the silence with which he shuts off his own real personality.... But as soon as the artist prostitutes his own reality he is no longer essentially productive...in spite of all precautions, such as changing the scene to Africa, his one-sided predilection will be privately recognizable.... This type of artistic production is therefore even, aesthetically speaking, a kind of private gossip. It is easily recognized because it is not balanced by its opposite; for ideality is the balance of opposites.... For an author, like any one else, must have his own private personality, but it must be his own holy of holies; and just as the entrance to a house is barred by the crossed bayonets of the guards, the approach to a man's personality is barred by the dialectical cross of qualitative opposites in an ideal equilibrium. (PA 70)

The meaning of this passage is less obscure than its language suggests. Kierkegaard wants to say that to talk about a subject is to describe it or to offer an interpretation of its significance. Now, in order to describe something, it is helpful to contrast it with its opposite. Thus, in order to describe suffering, it is helpful to contrast suffering with happiness. But if an author becomes less concerned with describing suffering than with calling attention to the fact that she personally has suffered, she will not produce a description of happiness with which to contrast her description of suffering. Rather, she will produce a detailed description of her suffering while slighting, or avoiding all together, a description of happiness. As a result, both descriptions

will be distorted. The description of suffering will exceed the limits of credibility while the description of happiness will fall short of them. Only the information that the author herself has suffered will come across with any kind of clarity.

But this kind of information is not an appropriate subject for talk, for, if the author's suffering is absolutely distinctive and therefore absolutely different from the suffering of any other individual, there is no point in her talking about it, for no one else will be able to understand it or to arrive at any kind of self-understanding through it. In fact, the author will not even be able to talk about it, for to name her experience as "suffering" is to presuppose the existence of a general class of experiences to which her own particular experience belongs. But if the author has, in fact, suffered-- if the term "suffering" appropriately describes her experience-- the fact that she has suffered is totally irrelevant to her description of suffering. Her description need never refer to the fact that the suffering it describes is her own.

To maintain the distinction between talk and silence, then, is to talk about a subject while remaining silent about one's personal relationship to that subject. This perfects the talk because it allows the subject to be contrasted with its opposite and thus to be described in clear distinction from it. But it also perfects the

silence-- the factor of the distinction between talk and silence which our discussion has slighted up to this point. What does it mean to perfect the silence? Stated negatively, it means that personal experiences remain personal to the extent that an individual does not talk about them-- or, rather, to the extent that an individual leaves herself out of her talk about them. Stated positively, it means that, for the individual whose experience it is, the particular details of the situation in which an experience occurs are inseparable from the experience itself. Thus, to take once again the example of suffering, the particular details of the situation in which suffering occurs-- the time, the place, whether the suffering is caused by nature or by human beings, whether it is physical or mental are inseparable from the individual's experience of suffering. They all combine to make this experience her experience and-- since no one else will be in precisely these circumstances or have precisely these reactions to them-- hers alone. Now, if the individual describes only the particular details of the situation in which her suffering occurred and does not describe some universal qualities of suffering which the situation reveals, she makes the mistake of believing that talk about private experiences can transform private experiences into shared experiences. If, on the other hand, she describes universal qualities of suffering without saying whether the particular details of the

situation through which she describes them are her own personal experiences or not, she acknowledges the fact that her particular experience of suffering is her particular experience. This is the perfection of silence.

Another way of making these same points is to say that the maintenance of the distinction between talk and silence is the maintenance of the distinction between public and private. With the statement of this equation, we return to the problems of the present age for, just as the present age collapses the distinction between talk and silence in talkativeness, so it also collapses the distinction between public and private in gossip:

With gossip, therefore, the vital distinction between what is private and what is public is obliterated, and everything is reduced to a kind of private-public gossip which corresponds more or less to the public of which it forms part. (PA 72)

But how, exactly, does the present age collapse the distinction between public and private and how is the collapse of this distinction a defining characteristic of the public? Kierkegaard raises this issue in the remainder of the paragraph:

The public is public opinion which interests itself in the most private concerns. Something that nobody would dare to tell to a gathering, that nobody could talk about, and which even the gossips would not like to admit to having gossiped about, can perfectly well be written for the public and, as a member of the public, people may know all about it. (PA 72)

It is not difficult to provide examples of "public opinion which interests itself in the most private concerns". The present age is filled to overflowing with information about the private affairs of public figures. Not only does everyone know about these affairs; everyone is expected to have an opinion about them-- to decide whether an artist or politician or athlete or intellectual really did what he or she is said to have done.

The role of the media is obvious here. In many cases, these people become public figures in the first place through the public exposure provided by the media. But whether their status as public figures originated with the media or not, when everyone comes to know about their private affairs, it is not because everyone has made their personal acquaintance and gained their personal trust. It is because the media tell them.

The role of the public here is less immediately obvious than that of the media but it also can be made clear. Everyone can know about and have an opinion about the private affairs of public figures because there are no qualifications for having this kind of knowledge or opinion. Real publics-- an art public, a political public, a sports public, and intellectual public-- are differentiated by their abilities to talk about a particular subject in the terms proper to it. They therefore presuppose the existence of definite subjects and of different kinds of knowledge and opinion which are

appropriate to them.

But the public does not talk about definite subjects. It does not talk about an artist's art, a politician's policies, an athlete's athletic feats or an intellectual's ideas. Rather, it gossips about the private life of the artist, politician, athlete or intellectual. But this kind of gossip creates a situation parallel to the situation created by the author who does not talk about suffering but calls attention to the fact that she has suffered. If people's private experiences really are distinctive and, as such, raise important issues for public discussion, it is possible to discuss and to form an opinion about these experiences without ever knowing whose experiences they are. It is possible to discuss and to form an opinion about a particular kind of sexual practice, for example, without ever knowing who engages in it.

If, on the other hand, people's private experiences really are not distinctive-- if their public works and not their private experiences are the sources of their distinction-- the addition of their names to a description of a quite nondescript experience will not make the experience distinctive. Rather, as Kierkegaard states,

...people's names are always mentioned and they are people whose trivial life is interesting because of their names...but the subject is non-existent from an ideal point of view. (PA 71)

But if the subject is non-existent from an ideal point of view-- if it is indeterminate and indistinct-- the

people who know about it do not know about anything determinate and distinct. If they do not know about anything determinate and distinct, they cannot become members of determinate and distinct publics on the basis of their knowledge. They cannot be members of an art or political or sports or intellectual public. Instead they can only be undifferentiated members of the public.

And because they do not know about any distinct public subjects, they cannot have any distinct personal opinions. In fact, they do not have opinions at all. Instead of personal opinions about public subjects, they have vicarious experiences of the private experiences of public figures. But this vicarious experience cannot make them any more personally determinate than their lack of knowledge about any determinate subject can make them a member of a determinate public. For if the private experiences of public figures are not distinctive, people cannot become distinct by experiencing them. And if they are distinctive, people cannot become individuals by experiencing them-- first of all, because everyone would have the same experience; second, because the experience everyone had would be someone else's experience and not their own. But insofar as people are not distinct individuals, they are undifferentiated members of the public.

What looks, then, like a simple reversal of the distinction between public and private on the part of the present age is, in fact, the destruction of the distinction. Private matters become public insofar as everyone knows about them and is expected to have an opinion about them. But this means that these matters are private only in the impoverished sense that they are not really public. They are not subjects of public talk; they are objects of private experience. But this kind of private experience is, as we have seen, not really private at all. It is public-- but public only in the impoverished sense that it is not private.

Having given an account of the destruction of the distinctions between talk and silence or public and private by the present age, we are in a position to see what one aspect of successful resistance to the present age necessarily must involve. On the one hand, there must be distinct subjects which are public and which are therefore subjects for talk. On the other hand, there must be distinct subjects who are private and are therefore subjects for silence. The attempt to show what this distinction means and how it can be brought into existence in the present age is a project of the rest of Kierkegaard's work.

7

The second qualitative distinction which the present age collapses is the distinction between form and content:

What is formlessness? It is the result of doing away with the vital distinction between form and content. (PA 72)

What does it mean to collapse this distinction and what does it mean to maintain it? In the realm of ideas, to collapse the distinction means to take a content-- in this case, the content of a concept-- which applies to a distinct realm of experience and to apply it to all realms of experience without distinction. It does not mean to employ false concepts, in other words, but to employ true concepts in areas to which they do not apply. For example, to explain the meaning of human existence in terms of relativity theory and to explain the workings of the physical universe in terms of Taoism, so that the two sets of terms become coterminous in their application, is to fail to make a distinction between the world of human subjects and the world of physical objects. Concepts which are meaningful when they are restricted in scope become meaningless when they are unrestricted. To describe neutrons as following Tao is to empty the concept of

following the Tao of all determinate content:

Formlessness may...unlike madness or stupidity, have a content that is true, but the truth it contains can never be essentially true. It will be capable of being extended so as to include everything or touch upon everything.... (PA 72-73)

In contrast to this unrestricted application of a concept, the restriction of a concept to the distinct area to which it applies preserves the determinate meaning of the concept or what Kierkegaard calls its "real content":

....a real content is clearly, and, if one likes, miserably limited because of its intensity and self-absorption. (PA 73)

But Kierkegaard is not concerned solely-- or even primarily-- with the realm of ideas but with the realm of action. In this realm, the formlessness of the present age reveals itself through what initially appears to be the opposite of formlessness-- namely, an unrestricted enthusiasm for "acting on principle":

The universality of formlessness in a passionless but reflective age is expressed, moreover, not only by the fact that the most varied ideas are found dallying in the same company but by the diametrically opposite fact that people find a paramount longing for and pleasure in 'acting on principle'. (PA 73)

The expression "acting on principle" seems to mean acting on the basis of a standard which determines what counts as an appropriate action. Whether the standard of appropriateness is aesthetic, ethical, religious or of some other type does not concern us here. What does concern us

is the fact that a standard of appropriateness is also a standard of inappropriateness and that it therefore makes distinctions between the kinds of actions which are appropriate and the kinds of actions which are inappropriate. These distinctions serve a double purpose. Not only do they allow an individual to do good and shun evil. They also allow an individual to act in a way which is definite and determinate instead of indefinite and indeterminate. The more definite the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate actions, the greater the possibility that appropriate actions will also be definite, determinate actions.

Thus, if people in the present age really were acting on principle, the quality of their actions would stand in absolute contrast to the quality of their ideas. While their ideas are indefinite and indeterminate, their actions would be definite and determinate. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that, for the present age, "acting on principle" means exactly the opposite of what it seems to mean. It means to make no distinctions between kinds of actions and, thus, to act without restriction:

To [a passionless individual] a principle is something purely external for the sake of which he does one thing as willingly as another and the opposite of both into the bargain. (PA 73)

What, then, is the true meaning of "acting on principle"? Kierkegaard describes it as follows:

A principle, as the word indicates, is what comes first, i.e. the substance, the idea in the

undeveloped form of feeling and of enthusiasm which drives on the individual by its own inner power. (PA 73)

In order to clarify the meaning of this passage, it is necessary to give an example. In this case Kierkegaard's own previous example of the author who is attempting to describe suffering can be used to show what it means to act on principle.

In order to describe suffering, the author must have experienced suffering herself or observed the suffering of others. The experience or observation of the "substance"-- or content-- of suffering "is what comes first".

But while the initial experience or observation of suffering is a necessary condition for describing it, it is not a sufficient condition. If the author is attempting to describe suffering herself, there must be some discrepancy between her own experience or observation of suffering and the publicly available descriptions of suffering such that the latter do not do justice to the former. But this means that, until she comes up with a description which does do justice to her experience or observation, her "idea" of what suffering is will be "undeveloped". It will be indefinite and indeterminate until she can make it definite and determinate.

But even this condition-- that the meaning of suffering be indefinite and indeterminate-- while it is necessary, is not a sufficient condition for describing suffering. It is safe to assume that the author has had or

has observed many other experiences whose meanings are as indefinite and indeterminate for her as is the meaning of suffering. Not only can she not-- given the obvious temporal limitations-- make the meanings of all of them determinate; it is not at all obvious that she would want to. On the contrary, she may have no interest in making the meanings of any of them determinate. Therefore, if she attempts to describe suffering, it must matter to her in some way to make the meaning of suffering determinate. This is what it means to say that the content-- in this case, the content of the idea of suffering-- is initially present in the "form of feeling and of enthusiasm which drives on the individual by its own inner power." "Feeling and enthusiasm" for determining the meaning of this particular experience inspire the author to describe the meaning of suffering and not the meaning of other experiences or no experiences at all.

But while feeling and enthusiasm inspire the author to make the meaning of suffering definite and determinate, "feeling" and "enthusiasm" themselves seem to be very indefinite terms for describing the quality of the author's commitment to her task. To show that Kierkegaard's use of such indefinite terms is intentional here is to state the concluding point of this extremely condensed and difficult passage. The point is that the author's feeling and enthusiasm for determining the meaning of suffering are initially as indefinite and indeterminate as is the meaning

of suffering itself. This is why Kierkegaard says that it is the "undeveloped" form of feeling and enthusiasm which drives on the individual by its own inner power. The form of the individual's commitment only becomes definite and determinate as its content becomes definite and determinate. The author cannot have a definite commitment to determining the meaning of suffering until she at least has begun to determine its meaning.

Having discussed a single example at length, we are now in a position to generalize from that example in order to determine the meaning of acting on principle-- or, to return to Kierkegaard's original terms, the meaning of maintaining the distinction between form and content. Action has content when it is definite and determinate. Talk, which is a kind of action, has content when the ideas it expresses are definite and determinate. But the actions and ideas of the present age are indefinite and indeterminate; they are formless. If they are to be definite and determinate, individuals must make them so. "Feeling" and "enthusiasm"-- or, as we shall see later, "passion"-- are the names for that in terms of which it matters to an individual to make actions or ideas definite and determinate.

Action has form when it is the expression of individual feeling and enthusiasm, of individual passion.

In other words, action has form when it makes a difference to an individual; when it matters to her. But action which is indefinite and indeterminate can only express indefinite and indeterminate feeling and enthusiasm. It cannot make a difference to an individual because it is not a real action. It lacks what Kierkegaard calls "real content". In short, passion is only determinate and definite when the actions or ideas which express it are determinate and definite.

Another way of making the preceeding points is to say that form and content require each other and that they therefore come into existence together. This is the case, in turn, because the existence of both form and content entails a kind of exclusiveness. The content of an action or an idea is definite or determinate to the extent that it excludes other contents. An individual who wants to do political work, for example, may have to sacrifice her desire to become an artist. The price of trying to do both political and artistic work is that neither activity will take on any definite shape or direction. In fact, the individual may spend more time trying to balance the demands of two very different kinds of activity than she actually spends doing either one.

Once again, it is important to note that the principle of exclusiveness is not a quantitative principle. An individual can be a political worker and an artist or do political art. But exclusions have to be made at some

point or, in the attempt to do everything, the individual will end up doing nothing.

What, then, is the basis for these exclusions? The basis for focussing on some ideas or actions-- some content-- and excluding others is precisely what Kierkegaard calls "form". The fact that politics makes a difference to the individual while art does not or that art makes a difference to her while politics do not determines the kind of action to which she will commit herself.

But if the possible contents of ideas or actions exclude each other, so do the possible forms. The form of an action or an idea is definite and determinate to the extent that it excludes other forms. Thus, a passion for politics is only definite and determinate to the extent that it excludes a passion for art. If this were not the case-- if politics and art made the same kind of difference to the individual-- this difference could not be the basis for determining which kind of activity she will commit herself to. The same kind of difference is no difference. If everything makes the same kind of difference, nothing makes any difference.

But the basis of differences in form-- of differences in how ideas or actions make a difference to an individual-- is precisely what Kierkegaard calls "content". An individual can recognize the difference between passion and indifference only because she recognizes the difference between the ideas and actions which make a difference to

her and the ideas and actions which do not. Without the differences in content, there would be no differences in form.

The present age, needless to say, lacks both of these differences. Once again, this lack is revealed in the present age version of acting 'on principle':

'On principle' one can do anything and what one does is, fundamentally, a matter of indifference. (PA 74)

Having determined the true meaning of acting "on principle"-- or of maintaining the distinction between form and content-- we are now in a position to see how the actions which result from the lack of this distinction are a "matter of indifference". First, because people in the present age make no distinction between what they will and will not do, their actions are undifferentiated, indefinite and indeterminate. Their activity lacks content. Second, the actions of people in the present age do not matter to them. Their actions make no difference to them. Their activity lacks form.

But to fail to maintain the distinction between form and content is not simply to fail to have determinate actions and passions. It is to fail to be an individual at all. For, in lacking any definite, determinate ideas or actions and any definite, determinate passions, people in

the present age lack anything which could differentiate them from anyone else and give them their individual identities:

'On principle' a man can do anything, take part in anything and himself remain inhuman and indeterminate. (PA 74)

The irony of this situation, of course, is that the result of acting "on principle" is the direct opposite of its intention. What is intended as evidence of the distinctiveness of the individual and her actions is, instead, evidence of her status as an undifferentiated member of the public:

[A principle] is something immense which even the most insignificant man can add to the most insignificant action, and thus become tremendously self-important.... A principle, in that sense, becomes a monstrous something or other, an abstraction, just like the public. (PA 73)

8

The third qualitative distinction which the present age collapses is the distinction between concealment and revelation:

What is superficiality and the desire to show off? Superficiality is the result of doing away with the vital distinction between concealment and revelation. (PA 75)

Superficiality means that the meaning of action is its appearance. Showing off means that the intention of action is the attraction of attention to itself. When we put these two meanings together, we see that the actions of people in the present age are matters of appearance because their only intention is to call attention to themselves.

As a form of intentional action, in other words, superficiality "is the revelation of emptiness". (PA 75) It reveals everything, because its entire meaning is on its surface and nothing is concealed. And it reveals nothing because it reveals only itself. Because nothing is concealed, nothing can be revealed. The logical outcome of this situation is the loss of any meaningful restrictions on action. People will do anything which will attract attention:

[Superficiality] is the revelation of emptiness, but where mere scope is concerned it

wins, because it has the advantage of dazzling people with its brilliant shams. (PA 75)

But what is the motivation for the superficiality of people in the present age? The answer can only be that they want to appear to be different from other people. The attraction of attention to themselves confirms their difference from others. If people notice them, it is because they stand out from others in some way.

Now, in order to stand out from others, people must take up the position of an other toward themselves. They must be able to stand outside themselves and ask what could make them look different to an outside observer. In other words, they must take up a reflective position towards themselves. Their "love of showing off is the self-admiration of conceit in reflection". (PA 75)

But a difference which can be recognized by others is a particular kind of difference. In other words, Kierkegaard refers to it as a direct difference. But while Kierkegaard himself never directly defines direct differences, it is crucial to the understanding of the distinction between revelation and concealment that we attempt to do so.

What, then, are direct differences? Direct differences have two defining characteristics-- they allow us to say what is different about a person and how a person is different.

To be able to say what is different about a person is to be able to point to particular actions which deviate

from a norm. If a woman wears a safety pin in her ear or works in a coal mine, her actions deviate from the norms of women's dress or women's work. To be able to say how a person is different is to be able to point to the general area in which she deviates from the norm. In the examples above, she is deviant with respect to dress or deviant with respect to work.

But Kierkegaard's point about direct differences is that direct differences cannot be the basis of individual identity. The attempt to establish one's difference from others by deviating from a norm depends upon the existence of a norm from which to deviate. But insofar as everyone rejects the norm, there remains no norm to reject. The project of difference self-destructs. We have another case of the failure of a "negative unity"-- of an attempt to establish individual identity and individual difference through the direct rejection of the standard identity-- to establish and maintain both identity and difference. In the wake of this failure, the person who attempted to become a differentiated individual becomes an undifferentiated member of the public.

Suppose, however, that everyone does not reject the norm, that for the majority of the people the norm remains in force? Would not this situation allow the people who did deviate to establish their identity and their difference from other people on this basis? On Kierkegaard's analysis, it would not. For the fact that

there are norms with respect to which people can deviate means that, in the very process of naming their difference, we relativize it. A person may differ with respect to dress or with respect to work but to differ in specific respects precisely is not to differ in toto. A similarity to others underlies her difference and allows us to name it. And if we can name it, we also can extend the norm in order to include it. But to act in such a way that one's particular actions can be subsumed completely under a general norm is to fail to be a differentiated individual. It is to be an undifferentiated member of the public.

Superficiality, then, is the attempt to attract attention to oneself through the establishment of direct differences between oneself and others. Because direct differences are inherently self-destructive, superficiality results not in differentiated individuals but in undifferentiated members of the public.

Once this point has been established, it is not difficult to see how the media directly contribute to the creation of the public. The proliferation, in recent years, of television shows devoted solely to the display of the personal idiosyncrasies of ordinary-- or, as they prefer to call them, "real"-- people is perhaps the best of many possible examples. Unlike earlier shows, which at least claimed to be presenting talent, defined in some

relatively traditional sense, the newer shows make no pretense to be presenting anything of any significance. And this lack of pretense is not limited to the producers of these programs. It extends to the participants, as well, who seem to take it for granted that their actions have no other motive or meaning than to put them on television in front of the largest possible audience.

But, self-consciously or not, these shows do make a meaningful statement. That statement is that all differences are superficial. Differences in talent are real differences. Some people can play music and others cannot. Some people are athletic and others are not. But anyone can do the kinds of things which are done by the people on the programs in question. Thus, while the ostensible purpose of these programs is the celebration of humanity in all of its wondrous variety, the underlying message is that, below the surface, real people are all the same.

To summarize our discussion up to this point, we can say that the present age reverses the distinction between revelation and concealment and, in reversing it, destroys it. The revelation of people in the present age is not the revelation of anything but is mere surface display. It is only revelation in the negative sense that there is nothing that is not revealed, that is concealed. Similarly, the

concealment of people in the present age is not the concealment of anything. The meaning behind their actions is concealed because it does not exist. Their concealment is therefore only concealment in the negative sense that there is nothing that is not concealed, that is revealed.

What, then, would it mean to maintain the distinction between revelation and concealment? What would it mean for "the concealment...of inwardness...to conceive an essential mystery which can then be made manifest"? (PA 75) In other words, if the attempt to become a differentiated individual through superficiality inevitably self-destructs, what is the proper relationship between revelation and concealment such that truly individual differentiation results?

In order to answer this question, we must understand the relationship of the distinction between concealment and revelation to the distinction between form and content. For if being determinate means having content, being a determinate individual must mean having content which differentiates one in some way. Indeed, any attempt at differentiation which made no appeal to differences in content would seem to be so abstract as to result in total non-differentiation.

But how can differences in determinate content produce differentiated individuals? To attempt to find some particular content in terms of which to stand out from the

prevailing norms is, as we have seen, ultimately to destroy the norms and thus all difference from them. So it cannot be the case that the content of an individual's actions-- what she does-- differentiates her from other individuals.

At this point, it is tempting to think that what differentiates an individual is not what she does but how she does it-- the form of her action rather than the content. But the attempt to separate the form of action from its content results, once again, in non-differentiation. As we argued above, if all content makes the same kind of difference, none of it makes any difference. The form of action cannot be differentiated if its content is undifferentiated.

But if neither the content nor the form of action is able to produce a differentiated individual, what other possibilities remain? The only remaining possibility is that the individual is differentiated by both the content and the form of her action and that she is so differentiated precisely to the extent that the content and form of her action cannot be described as isolable elements but can only be described in terms of each other. Thus, the form of individual action can only be described by way of its content. We can say that an individual has passion when she does this particular thing and that she lacks passion when she does that particular thing. In other words, there can be no direct description of the form of her action. There is no other way of describing it than by

saying that it is the quality which these particular actions have and which those particular actions lack.

And, conversely, the content of individual action can only be described by way of its form. We can say that an individual's action has content when it makes this kind of difference to her and that it lacks content when it does not. In other words, there can be no direct description of the content of her action. There is no other way of describing it than by saying that it is the content which she has when she acts passionately and which she lacks when she does not.

In order to understand the consequences of this inseparability of form and content for the problem of individual differentiation, it is necessary to move from abstract analysis to concrete examples. Let us assume that a person is maintaining, in her political action, the distinction between form and content and that, in so doing, this person is a differentiated individual. How would we describe her and her action?

To describe what she does-- the content of her action-- as "political work" is to fail to do justice to what she does. But this is not because she does not do political work. It is not, in other words, because what she does is directly different from what people in the present age do so that present age language cannot describe it. "Political work" is an accurate description of what she does, of the content of her action.

And yet, for her, "political work" will be an inadequate, if not an inaccurate, description of her action, for it cannot capture the difference between the quality of her political work, the way it makes a difference to her, and the quality of political work for someone in the present age who is dispassionately involved in it or not involved in it at all. This inadequacy of present age language is a critical one because, as we argued above, it is impossible to describe the content of individual action independently of its quality. In other words, the content of the action of a passionate individual is different from the content of the action of a dispassionate person who, from the standpoint of present age language, is doing the "same" thing. But precisely because the passionate individual is doing the "same" thing and not something directly different in content from what the dispassionate person is doing, the present age has no language in which to describe the difference in content between the two actions. The difference is indescribable.

We can make a parallel argument about the inability of present age language to describe the difference in form between the actions of a passionate individual and those of a dispassionate member of the present age. To describe how a passionate individual acts-- the form of her action-- in present age terms is to fail to do justice to how she does what she does. This is not because the present age lacks a language for describing the quality of actions. It has

such a language. But this language consistently describes the quality of actions in quantitative terms. Thus, it describes the difference between passion and dispassion by describing how the passionate individual devotes more time or more money or more energy to her projects than does the dispassionate individual. And, again, this description is not necessarily an inaccurate description of how a passionate individual goes about her work. She may very well devote more time and money and energy to her work than do dispassionate people.

But all of these descriptions will, again, be inadequate, if accurate, descriptions of how she does her work. It does not capture the difference between how she does political work and how a member of the present age does political work to say that she does more of it-- whether in terms of time, energy, money or something else. This way of stating the difference assumes that she and the present age person are doing the same thing and that we therefore can say what one does more and the other does less of. But the whole point of the preceding paragraphs was that these two people are not doing the same thing. Therefore, direct comparisons between their different ways of doing it are impossible.

But it is not simply the case that the form of passionate action cannot be described in the same terms as can the form of dispassionate action. Kierkegaard's deeper point is that it cannot be described at all. AS we saw in

our discussion of the distinction between form and content, the difference that an individual's action makes to her is a difference which is made by a particular content. If it were a difference which could be made by any content whatsoever, it would be no difference. Therefore, in order to describe how what she does makes a difference to her, we must be able to describe what she does. But, as we saw above, what she does-- the content of her action-- cannot be described. And it cannot be described precisely because it makes a difference to her.

Having shown why neither the content nor the form of passionate action can be described directly, we are now in a position to clear up a misconception which may have arisen in the course of our discussion. It would be possible to interpret Kierkegaard's support for the maintenance of the distinction between revelation and concealment as a kind of conservatism. In other words, it would be possible to think that individuals who want to maintain the distinction between revelation and concealment can only undertake actions which, insofar as they are describable, are describable in the current language of the present age. For, if individuals do otherwise, the differences between their actions and present age actions will be direct differences rather than indirect differences and either will self-destruct or will be absorbed back into

the norms of the present age.

In order to clear up this misconception, it simply is necessary to note that, if an individual is performing actions which are describable in the current language of the present age and is maintaining the distinction between revelation and concealment, the aspect of her actions which differentiates her as an individual is not describable in present age terms. Similarly, if an individual is performing actions which are not describable in the current language of the present age and is maintaining the distinction between revelation and concealment, the terms which the present age eventually invents in order to describe her actions will not describe that aspect of her actions which differentiates her as an individual. Thus, when the present age names her direct differences and absorbs them into its norms, she simply will be in the position of someone who, from the beginning, maintained the distinction between revelation and concealment through actions which can be described in present age terms.

In short, the maintenance of the distinction between revelation and concealment does not require submission to the norms of the present age. Rather, it makes the issue of submission to or violation of these norms irrelevant to the project of individual differentiation. Indirect differences maintain themselves equally well in conformity and in rebellion.

Having cleared up this misconception, we can now summarize what it means to maintain the distinction between revelation and concealment and say how the maintenance of this distinction amounts to being a differentiated individual. In one respect, the content and form of individual action can be observed directly and can be described in present age terms-- either in the current language of the present age or in the language it develops in order to talk about particular differences in practice as these arise. That aspect of individual action which does not differ from action in the present age or which differs from it directly is what Kierkegaard means by "revelation".

In another respect, however, the content and form of individual action are indirectly different from the content and form of the actions of people in the present age. What an individual does and how she does it cannot be described in present age terms. This is what Kierkegaard means by "concealment".

So, insofar as a person's actions are the same as the actions of people in the present age or are directly different from them, a person is no different from any other person. Insofar as a person's actions are indirectly different from the actions of people in the present age, that person is a differentiated individual. Because the actions of a differentiated individual are indirectly,

rather than directly, different from the actions of people in the present age, they do not self-destruct and they are not absorbed into present age norms. Because the actions of a differentiated individual are indescribable in principle and not simply in fact, an individual can maintain her individuality throughout all the particular changes in practice and language which the present age undergoes.

The fourth, and final, qualitative distinction which the present age collapses is the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity:

What is reasoning? It is the result of doing away with the vital distinction which separates subjectivity and objectivity. (PA 76)

What, then, are subjectivity and objectivity and how does the present age collapse the difference between them? Kierkegaard begins with objectivity:

As a form of abstract thought reasoning is not profoundly dialectical enough....(PA 76)

When Kierkegaard calls thought "dialectical", he is referring to its ability to distinguish between opposing positions and to make the reasons for their opposition clear. Thus, dialectical thought can present the reasons for being a traditionalist and the reasons for being a revolutionary and can show how these reasons conflict. It is rationally inconsistent to support both the preservation of aristocratic privilege and the establishment of democratic institutions. There are reasons for supporting aristocracy and reasons for supporting democracy and these reasons are mutually exclusive. Dialectical thought can make these reasons and their oppositions clear.

Of course, insofar as dialectical thought is really thought-- insofar as it is rational-- it also can point out the cases of irrationality on either side and can show that some or all of the reasons which are offered in support of a particular position are, in fact, unreasonable-- that traditionalists are painting a picture of aristocracy which is based upon romantic fiction rather than on fact, for instance, or that the economic analyses of the revolutionaries fail to take into account some basic facts about the nature of production.

Now, insofar as these criticisms are rational criticisms, they are objective criticisms. The arguments which support them are not interested and partisan but are arguments which should be accepted by any dispassionate observer. Objectivity, in other words, is the ability to distinguish dispassionately between rationally opposed positions and to recognize the irrational elements in positions which claim to be rational.

Now it is precisely this kind of objectivity which the present age lacks. Once again, the media provide the best illustrations of this lack. It is possible to imagine a kind of journalistic objectivity which would function in the manner just described. Newspapers, radio and television would present the arguments of opposing sides in such a way that the differences between the reasons for supporting each side were clear. Thus, they would allow people to make an educated decision about an issue--

educated because people would know what was at issue, decision because they would recognize that the two sides are irreconcilably opposed and that it therefore is impossible to go both ways on the issue.

But the media in the present age do not even attempt, much less achieve, this kind of objectivity. Instead of presenting the irreconcilable reasons for supporting one side or the other or showing how conflicting reasons can be mediated in a higher rationality, the media engage in a kind of reasoning which simply abolishes the conflict.

Now, once again, it is important to recognize that the problem here is not a quantitative problem. It is not, in other words, that the media do not present enough of the facts about an issue or enough of the reasons in support of each side. Rather, it is a qualitative problem. It is a matter of the kinds of facts or reasons which the media present. When a particular action is at issue-- a war, for instance, or a strike-- the media allot a great amount of coverage to both the supporters and the opponents of the action. But the coverage they allot is of a particular type. They present the supporters and the opponents of the action in such a way that their positions are not seen to be the products of more or less reasonable interpretations of a situation but instead are seen to be the products of interested and essentially self-serving motives. Opponents of the war are trying to avoid being drafted or are rebelling against their parents. Supporters are trying to

protect their defense-related jobs or to express their resentment of younger people whose lives have demanded fewer sacrifices than have their own. Workers are striking in order to satisfy selfish demands and not in order to satisfy the demands of economic justice. Management is not concerned about the justice of the workers' cause but is attempting to reassert its power by taking a hard-line stance in a situation in which it has a better than even chance of emerging the victor.

In other words, the media take an objective issue-- an issue about which there can be rational disagreement and about which a person with no direct interest in the issue can have a rational position-- and turn it into a subjective issue-- an issue in which the only thing at stake is the narrow self-interest of the conflicting parties. Reasoning determines in advance that the only "reasons" which count as reasons are self-interested and that all other appeals to reason are therefore rationalizations.

By presenting the issues in this way, the media insure their own neutrality, since they stand outside the interests of either party. At the same time, they insure the neutrality of the public, since most people stand outside of them as well. Having seen the conflict for what it is, they are relieved of the necessity of taking a stand on it. This is not to say that they have no opinion but that the opinion they have "as an opinion and a

conviction...lacks full-blooded individuality" (PA 76). It does not commit them to the active support of one side or the other but is the opinion of a disinterested observer. In other words, by making an objective issue subjective in the shallow sense, the media effectively prevent the emergence of subjectivity in the deep sense. They prevent the active commitment of the individual to one side or the other of an issue and the consequent self-definition of the individual in terms of this commitment.

But if the media collapse the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity by making the objective subjective, they also collapse it in the opposite manner-- by making the subjective objective. We can find examples of this reversal in the way in which the media cover-- or cover up-- political conflicts.

A choice between conflicting political parties is a choice about the kind of life a person making the choice would like to have. In this sense, it is a qualitative choice. And, in this sense, it is a subjective choice. But the media do not present the choice in this way. Instead of showing how the positions of the different parties are proposals of different kinds of lives-- instead of focussing on the qualitative differences between parties-- the media focus on the positions of the parties in the opinion polls-- on the quantitative differences

between parties. By reporting the conflict as a conflict of numbers rather than a conflict of opinions, the media give the numbers a reality which appears to exist independently of the active convictions of actual people. And, as the reality appears, so it becomes. As people become dispassionate observers of the political process rather than partisan participants in it, the qualitative differences between parties progressively diminish. Reasoning assures in advance that the power behind all decisions will be the rational, objective power of numbers and not the irrational, subjective power of opinion.

Although this reversal of the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity is the opposite of that described above, the situation in which it results is the same. "As an opinion and a conviction", the opinion solicited by opinion polls "lacks full-blooded individuality". An opinion which has "full-blooded individuality" is one through which a person becomes a determinate individual by actively identifying herself with one position or the other. But when there are no qualitatively different positions because all positions are seen either as interested in the narrowest sense-- as when objectivity becomes subjectivity-- or as having nothing to do with interest-- as when subjectivity becomes objectivity-- there is nothing determinate to which to commit oneself. The only possible response to non-differentiated issues is a non-differentiated

response-- a response as a third party, not as a party; a response as an observer, not as a participant; a response as a member of the public, not as an individual.

To sum up our argument, then, we can say that the media collapse the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity and, in so doing, create the public. But in the course of making this argument, we seem to have allowed ourselves to stumble into a fundamental contradiction. Our account of the role of the media in collapsing the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity has rested upon two assumptions-- first, that there are different parties with different rational positions on the issues which concern the present age; and, second, that the issues which concern the present age are issues about the quality of individual and social life. But our analysis of the present age up to this point has claimed exactly the opposite-- that there are no qualitative issues for the present age precisely because rationality has undermined them. The obvious question which follows, then, is, how can the media destroy subjectivity and objectivity when they do not exist in the first place?

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to see that the media play a different role in relation to the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity than they do in relation to the distinctions which we have discussed

previously. In the case of the other distinctions, the role of the media was to provide the illusion of a distinction in the absence of a distinction, to cover up the devastating effects of the levelling process by claiming to put something in the place of the traditional distinctions which the levelling process destroys. But in the case of subjectivity and objectivity, the role of the media is to serve the levelling process directly by unmasking all claims to subjectivity and objectivity as rationalizations of present age interests.

Thus, in the case of objectivity, as we have seen, the media undermine the claims of conflicting parties to different rational positions on an issue by showing that these claims to rationality are really rationalizations of self-interest. Given the fact that the only motives for social conflict which can count as reasonable motives in the present age are the aspirations for individuality and equality, other reasons can only be rationalizations of self-serving motives. The task of the media is to expose these motives for what they are.

Similarly, in the case of subjectivity, as we have seen, the media undermine the claims of conflicting parties to different positions on qualitative issues by recasting qualitative differences as quantitative differences. But if the only issues which can count as issues for the present age are individuality and equality, the differences between positions can only be quantitative differences--

differences in the degree to which parties promote or impede the progress of individuality and equality and, with them, the progress of the levelling process itself. The task of the media is to locate the different parties along this scale and thus to reveal the quantitative basis of qualitative claims.

The media, then, do not create the illusion of subjectivity and objectivity. Rather, they progressively undermine the illusion that subjectivity and objectivity could exist in the present age. And, in so doing, they force us to raise the following question: If subjectivity and objectivity, in the senses described above, cannot exist in the present age, what can it mean to maintain the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity? In other words, if there are no conflicting rational positions about the quality of life which demand objective understanding and subjective commitment, how can objectivity and subjectivity exist at all? Or, stated positively, can subjectivity and objectivity be redefined in such a way as to make their existence possible in the present age?

With this question, we have stated the issue which will be of paramount concern to us in all of the remaining chapters-- namely, how can subjectivity and objectivity even be possible, much less actual, given the conditions of the present age? But this formulation of the issue which

will concern us is not yet quite correct. In the remainder of his work, Kierkegaard has virtually nothing to say about the possibility of objectivity in the present age. When he does talk about objectivity, as in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, it is to argue that objectivity-- in this case, the objective understanding of Christianity-- can prevent subjectivity-- in this case, Christian subjectivity-- from coming into existence. But Kierkegaard has virtually no interest in discussing how true objectivity might displace the ersatz objectivity of the present age.

The issue which structures the remainder of Kierkegaard's work is, then, the issue of subjectivity. What could possibly be at issue for a person such that, from her stance on that issue, an individual identity issues forth? Being a party to a traditional relationship or being a member of a political party meant taking a stand on what it means to be a teacher or a revolutionary. It meant defining oneself in terms of the practices which defined these roles. But in the present age, as Kierkegaard has argued consistently, there are no such practices at issue. In terms of what, then can a person define herself?

Kierkegaard does not address this question in The Present Age. Rather, he sets it as the central question of the books which we will discuss in Chapters III through VI. But he does make a claim in The Present Age which sets the

stage for the arguments of the other books. The present age, as Kierkegaard has described it, seems to have made subjectivity radically impossible. And yet, in The Present Age, Kierkegaard claims exactly the opposite-- that, rather than making subjectivity radically impossible, the present age provides the opportunity for the highest kind of subjectivity to come into existence.

Kierkegaard sets the stage for the claim that the present age provides the opportunity for the highest kind of subjectivity to come into existence in the section of The Present Age which immediately precedes his discussion of the collapse of the distinctions between talk and silence, content and form, revelation and concealment and objectivity and subjectivity. There he states that:

The present age is essentially one of understanding lacking in passion, and has therefore abolished the principle of contradiction. (PA 68)

To say that the present age has abolished the principle of contradiction is to say that it has abolished qualitative distinctions-- both the social, hierarchical distinctions and the individual, egalitarian distinctions. The loss of these distinctions, Kierkegaard wants to claim, is the result of the victory of reflection over passion.

Now, it is important to note, in passing, that Kierkegaard has not substantiated the latter claim yet. He has shown that the present age collapses the distinctions between talk and silence, content and form, revelation and concealment and objectivity and subjectivity. In order to show that reflection is responsible for this collapse,

however, he first must show that individualism and egalitarianism are not responsible because these distinctions are, in fact, individual and egalitarian. Then, he must show that these distinctions can only be maintained by passion and that there is an irreconcilable conflict between passion and reflection. Kierkegaard does not present these arguments in The Present Age but in the books which we will discuss in the remaining chapters.

What Kierkegaard does argue in The Present Age, however, is that there is a positive aspect to the reflection of the present age-- positive in that it makes subjectivity a possibility:

By comparison with a passionate age, an age without passion gains in scope what it loses in intensity. But this scope may once again become the condition of a still higher form, if a corresponding intensity assumes control of the extended field of activity which is put at its disposal. (PA 68)

We can understand Kierkegaard's argument by translating it into the terms which we have used in our discussion up to this point. In contrast to the present age, both traditional and revolutionary ages lose in scope what they gain in intensity. Both traditional and revolutionary ages offer people determinate identities-- in the one case, social roles, in the other, parties. The concentration and focus which these identities provide are what Kierkegaard means by "intensity". But traditional and revolutionary ages achieve this intensity by restricting the range of possibilities which are available to people--

there are these roles and not others, these parties and not others. This restriction of the range of possibilities is what Kierkegaard means by loss of scope.

Now the present age gains in scope what it loses in intensity. All possibilities are open to people but none of these possibilities has any determinate content. A person can be a teacher, a politician, a parent-- whatever she wants-- but none of these roles has any definition and therefore there are no essential differences between them.

If, however, the present age could be made determinate-- "if a corresponding intensity assumes control of the extended field of activity"-- "a still higher form" of subjectivity than that of traditional and revolutionary ages would result. If, in other words, individuals could have all possibilities open to them, with no prior restrictions placed upon what they could and could not become either by a dominant authority or by competing parties and if the lack of restriction would result in individuals becoming determinate as individuals, the highest kind of subjectivity would have been achieved.

The present age reality, of course, is the direct opposite of this possibility. In abolishing the principle of contradiction, the present age has abolished individual identity:

The abolition of the principle of contradiction, expressed in terms of existence, means to live in contradiction with oneself. The creative omnipotence of the differentiating power of passion, which makes the individual completely at one with himself, is transformed into the

extended scope of reflective understanding: as a result of knowing and being everything possible, one is in contradiction with oneself, i.e. nothing at all. (PA 68)

But what does it mean to say that by abolishing the principle of contradiction the individual lives in contradiction? What does this apparently contradictory statement mean? Not to live in contradiction with oneself is to be at one with oneself. But to be at one with oneself requires that one have a self with which to be at one. To have a self is to have a determinate, differentiated identity. This, of course, is what individuals in the present age lack. They have no determinate, differentiated identity and thus are in contradiction with themselves or with the requirements for being a self.

By having a determinate, differentiated identity, on the other hand, the individual is not in contradiction with herself. And in not being in contradiction with herself, she preserves the principle of contradiction. Only by maintaining the difference-- or contradiction-- between what she is and what she is not does she become an individual:

The principle of contradiction strengthens the individual's faithfulness to himself and makes him as constant as the number three spoken of so beautifully by Socrates, when he says that it would rather endure anything than become four or even a large round number, and in the same way the individual would rather suffer and be true to himself than be all manner of things in contradiction with himself. (PA 68-69)

But people are not born into the present age as determinate differentiated individuals and, as we have seen, the present age certainly will not make them such. Therefore, if there are to be individuals in the present age, something other than the present age must bring them into existence. This is the context for Kierkegaard's reference to "the creative omnipotence of the differentiating power of passion". But in order to understand the meaning of this phrase, we must leave The Present Age and turn to Kierkegaard's other works. For although The Present Age contains numerous suggestions of what it would look like to be a passionate individual in the present age, it contains no suggestions about how someone might become such an individual. Instead, it moves directly from the description of the problem of the present age to an intimation of the solution. Kierkegaard reiterates his contention that the present age represents potentially a higher form of existence than do traditional or revolutionary ages and he indicates why this is the case:

For the development is, in spite of everything, a progress because all the individuals who are saved will receive the specific weight of religion, its essence at first hand, from God himself. Then it will be said: 'behold, all is in readiness, see how the cruelty of abstraction makes the true form of worldliness only too evident, the abyss of eternity opens before you, the sharp scythe of the leveller makes it possible for every one individually to leap over the blade-- and behold, it is God who waits. Leap, then, into the arms of God'. (PA 82)

He also indicates that there are intermediate steps between the present age and the arms of God and that the existence of these intermediate steps has something to do with the importance of reflection:

...a higher degree of reflection implies greater significance than immediate passion; for when enthusiasm intervenes to gather the powers of reflection together into a decision, and because reflection confers, on the average, a greater capacity for action-- then, when religion enters in, it takes command of that increased capacity for action. (PA 67-68)

The reflection of the present age, in other words, has potentially greater significance than does the immediate passion of traditional and revolutionary ages. If reflection can itself become a kind of passion, it will increase the capacity for individual action. Religion will then take over that capacity for action and transform it into the reality of action.

The attempt to make reflection a kind of passion is the subject of Chapters III and IV. It is the story of the aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence. The religious attempts to make the possibility of action a reality will be the subjects of Chapters V and VI. They are the stories of what Kierkegaard calls Religiousness A and Religiousness B. But we cannot leave The Present Age without taking note, as does Kierkegaard himself, of the conditions which the present age will place upon all of these attempts to establish subjectivity. These conditions come down to two-- to what Kierkegaard calls unrecognizability and suffering.

Kierkegaard introduces the notion of unrecognizability by way of another contrast between traditional ages and the present age:

The change which will come about is this. In the old order (which sprang from the relation between the individual and the generation) the officers, generals, heroes (i.e. the man of distinction, the leader within his own sphere) were recognizable, and every one (in proportion to his authority), with his little detachment, fitted picturesquely and organically into the whole, both supporting and supported by the whole. (PA 80)

Traditional ages, in other words, were marked by the existence of distinct cultural spheres-- politics, education, family, etc. The great individual stood out from other individuals-- the individual stood out from his generation-- to the extent that he exemplified for them the standards of his particular sphere. He could be recognized because everyone knew both what the different spheres were and what the standards were that were appropriate to each sphere. Insofar as these standards were shared, the culture was whole. The leaders were supported by the whole in the sense that they could only be leaders because they represented the standards which everyone shared. At the same time, the leaders supported the whole by providing people with exemplifications of these standards and thus

increasing their consciousness of and commitment to them.

But the present age, as we have seen, is characterized precisely by the loss of these common standards. Thus, the distinctive individual cannot be the individual who represents these standards because there are no standards to represent. Two consequences follow from this. First, the distinctive individual will be without authority. To be an authority is to exemplify standards which are held in common. But the present age has no standards which are held in common. Thus, an individual cannot be an authority. Second, not only will the distinctive individual not be an authority; she will not even be recognizable. For in order to be recognizable, she would have to represent common standards in terms of which she could be recognized as exemplary. But common standards, again, are precisely what the present age lacks. Thus,

From now on the great man, the leader (according to his position) will be without authority because he will have divinely understood the diabolical principle of the levelling process; he will be unrecognizable...
(PA 80)

But this unrecognizability is not, finally, just another inevitable and negative consequence of the levelling process. Rather, it is a testimony to the equality of all individuals before God. Before the advent of Christianity, Kierkegaard thinks, God's authority was believed to be revealed only through specially designated individuals such as prophets and judges. The rest of the

people, to whom God did not speak directly, were required to obey these authoritative individuals. But Christianity claims-- however much Christians have violated its claim in practice-- that each individual can have a direct relationship with God. This means that all individuals are equal before God. But if all individuals are equal before God and if a relationship with God is the solution to the problem of the present age, no one can be an authority for anyone else when it comes to solving that problem. Indeed, no one can even be identified directly as having solved it:

This order is dialectically the very opposite of that of the Prophets and Judges, and just as the danger for them lay in their authority not being recognized so nowadays the unrecognizable is in danger of being recognized, and of being persuaded to accept recognition and importance as an authority, which could only hinder the highest development. For they are unrecognizable and go about their work like secret agents, not because of any private instruction from God!-- for that is the case of Prophets and Judges-- but are unrecognizable (without authority) because they have understood the universal in equality before God, and, because they realize this and their own responsibility every moment, are thus prevented from being guilty of thoughtlessly realizing in an inconsistent form this consistent perception. (PA 80-81)

Unrecognizability, in other words, is the guarantor of individuality and equality and, as such, the sign that the supposed aims of the levelling of the social hierarchies have been fulfilled. As such, it is also the sign of a kind of activity which is the diametrical opposite of the activities of the press and the public which claim to bring meaning into the vacuum left by the social hierarchies.

The press and the public, as we have seen, conceal the meaninglessness of the present age by creating an illusion of meaning. They appear to be doing something when, in fact, they are doing nothing. The individual who successfully resists the present age, on the other hand, acts meaningfully but the meaning of her actions is concealed. She appears to be doing nothing-- to be doing what everyone else in the present age does-- when, in fact, she is doing something.

But this description of the unrecognizability of the individual who successfully resists the present age raises a troubling question-- if this individual cannot even be recognized, how can she possibly work effectively against the present age? Kierkegaard's answer is that, just as she cannot be recognized directly, so she cannot act directly. Indeed, the one follows from the other. For to act directly, by setting herself up in direct opposition to the representatives of the public, would be to claim authority as a representative of the solution.

But this inability to act directly leaves the individual in a peculiarly vulnerable position. Insofar as she can be recognized indirectly-- insofar as the present age recognizes that she stands in opposition to it without being able to say what it is that she does or how she does it that puts her in opposition-- the present age can take

action against her. She, however, has no defenses against it. Nothing that she can say or do can prove the superiority of her position. Indeed, to say or do anything for the sake of proof would be to destroy her position in order to save it. Thus, the second condition which the present age places upon successful resistance to it is suffering:

Only by suffering can the 'unrecognizable dare to help on the levelling process and, by the same suffering action, judge the instruments. He dare not overcome the levelling process directly, that would be his end, for it would be the same as acting with authority. But he will overcome it in suffering, and in that way express once more the law of his existence, which is not to dominate, to guide, to lead, but to serve in suffering and help indirectly. Those who have not made the leap will look upon his unrecognizable action, his suffering as failure; those who have made the leap will suspect that it was victory, but they can have no certainty, for they could only be made certain by him, and if he gave that certainty to a single person it would be the end of him, because he would have been unfaithful to the divinity in desiring to play at being authority: that would mean that he had failed; not only by being unfaithful to God in trying to use authority, but because he did not obey God and teach men to love one another by compelling himself, so that even though they begged him to do so he should not have deceived them by exerting authority. (PA 83)

Once again, it is important to recognize that, for Kierkegaard, what looks like a surrender to the present age is really a victory over it. It is true that the individual who resists the present age will suffer and might even be killed. But that for which she suffers cannot be killed for the present age cannot even recognize it. In her willingness to suffer for the sake of

maintenance of meaningful distinctions, the individual therefore testifies to the power of these distinctions and, in so doing, helps other individuals indirectly. For those who, like the representatives of the present age, recognize that this individual is different but who, unlike the representatives of the present age, take this difference as a sign of victory and not of defeat, may be encouraged to carry on in her stead. Because the individual who maintains meaningful distinctions is not herself the source of these distinctions, the possibility of maintaining meaningful distinctions lives even when particular individuals who have maintained them die.

Such, then, are the conditions which the present age places upon successful individual resistance to it. How the various attempts at resistance meet or fail to meet these conditions is the subject of our remaining chapters.

CHAPTER II:

THE SELF

We concluded our discussion of The Present Age with Kierkegaard's claim that the levelling of social, hierarchical qualitative distinctions-- the distinctions between fathers and sons, kings and subjects, teachers and students, men and women, etc.-- can become the occasion for the expression of individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions-- the distinctions between public and private, form and content, revelation and concealment, and subjectivity and objectivity. The question which this claim immediately provokes is, of course, the question as to how a person can come to express the latter distinctions in his or her own life. Kierkegaard's descriptions of the four spheres of existence-- the aesthetic, the ethical, Religiousness A and Religiousness B-- are his attempt to answer this question.

Before turning to the works which describe the spheres of existence, however, we first must introduce a new set of terms into our vocabulary. When Kierkegaard describes the attempt of each of the four spheres of existence to express individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions, the qualitative distinctions he discusses are not primarily the distinctions with which we are familiar from The Present Age-- the distinctions between public and private, form and

content, revelation and concealment, and subjectivity and objectivity. Rather, Kierkegaard describes the spheres as attempts to express three other qualitative distinctions--the distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal. Now, clearly, if Kierkegaard's work is coherent and systematic, there must be a relationship between these two sets of individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions. As our discussion of the spheres of existence proceeds, we will demonstrate precisely what this relationship is. In order to do so, however, we first must describe the distinctions which play the central roles in Kierkegaard's descriptions of the spheres. To do this, we must turn to what is, perhaps, the most important single passage in all of Kierkegaard's writings-- Anti-Climacus' definition of the self in The Sickness Unto Death.

1

Anti-Climacus' definition of the self in The Sickness Unto Death is one of the most famous passages in all of Kierkegaard's writings. It is also one of the most misunderstood. Those commentators who do not simply dismiss it as a parody of Hegel nonetheless fail to provide a coherent and systematic exposition of it and therefore fail to appreciate its pivotal importance in Kierkegaard's thought. All of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works can be read as extended commentaries on Anti-Climacus' definition of the self. To understand this definition, therefore, is to gain a comprehensive overview of Kierkegaard's project and the issues which motivate it.

The essence of Anti-Climacus' definition of the self is expressed in three sentences:

A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of possibility and necessity, of the eternal and the temporal, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two [factors]. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self.

The self is a relation that relates itself to itself...the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. (SUD 146, SUDa 13)

It is important to notice, in the first place, that Anti-Climacus makes a distinction in this passage between a

human being and a self. To be a human being is to be "a relation between two factors"-- infinite and finite, possibility and necessity, and the eternal and the temporal. To be a self, on the other hand, "is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself".

The distinction between being a human being and being a self is, as we shall see, the distinction between being in the present age and being in a sphere of existence. People in the present age have the capacity to express the distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity, and the eternal and the temporal. They are human beings. But instead of expressing these distinctions, people in the present age both level them-- as they level the social, hierarchical qualitative distinctions-- and create illusory versions of them-- as they do of the individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions which Kierkegaard discusses in The Present Age. Individuals in the spheres of existence, on the other hand, express the distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity, and the eternal and the temporal. Having actualized his or her capacity for expressing these distinctions, a person in a sphere of existence is not only a human being but a self.

What, then, are the distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal? As the reference to spheres of existence-- in the plural-- should suggest, there is no single answer to

this question. The four spheres of existence-- the aesthetic, the ethical, Religiousness A and Religiousness B-- are differentiated from each other precisely by their different definitions of these distinctions.

But this response appears to beg the question. If there is to be anything like progress between spheres, we must see the spheres as different definitions of what are, in some sense, the same distinctions. But if the distinctions which the spheres define are the same distinctions, how can there be different definitions of them?

To answer this question, it may be helpful to invoke a phrase from Martin Heidegger-- a phrase which, in its turn, may owe its inspiration to Kierkegaard. In a famous passage of Being and Time, Heidegger describes Dasein-- human being-- as "the being whose Being is an issue for it". For Kierkegaard, infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal are the names of the three issues a human being must resolve if he or she is to become a self. Though we can define these issues in general terms, we can describe their resolutions only in the particular terms of each of the four different spheres of existence. All that we can say about their resolutions in general terms is that a successful resolution involves defining the two sets of factors in such a way that they reinforce rather than negate each other. This is the significance of Anti-Climacus' description of a human being

as a synthesis of the two sets of factors and his distinguishing of the relationship which is indicated by the term "synthesis" from the relationship between body and soul in which a human being is a combination of two potentially separable components. The three lower spheres of existence-- the aesthetic, the ethical and Religiousness A-- are unsuccessful resolutions of the issues which confront a human being because they define the factors in such a way that they negate rather than reinforce each other. Only in Religiousness B, Anti-Climacus claims, does the self define itself in such a way that the two sets of factors reinforce rather than negate each other.

Having concluded our general remarks about Anti-Climacus' definition of the self, we have only two relatively brief tasks to accomplish in the remainder of this chapter before proceeding to the chapters about each of the particular spheres of existence. First, we need to give an account of the three issues which a human being must confront if he or she is to become a self. Second, we need to show how the present age both denies the existence of these issue and creates the illusion of having resolved them.

2

The accounts of the three issues which confront a human being if he or she is to become a self are found in two different books. The accounts of the issues of infinite and finite and possibility and necessity are found in Anti-Climacus' The Sickness Unto Death. The account of the issue of the eternal and the temporal is found in Vigilius Haufniensis' The Concept of Anxiety.

According to Anti-Climacus:

The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude which relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, a task which can be performed only by means of a relationship to God. But to become oneself is to become concrete. (SUD 162)

As we shall see in Chapter VI, to become concrete through a relationship to God means, for ANti-Climacus, to have concrete commitments. Concrete commitments have two aspects. In the first place, they are definite and determinate, such that I can act on them and such that my action makes me a definite, determinate individual. Thus, a commitment to feeding particular hungry people is concrete while a commitment to being conscious of the problem of world hunger is not. This definite, determinate aspect of concrete commitments is what Anti-Climacus means

by "finite". In the second place, concrete commitments, for Anti-Climacus, are unconditional commitments. A concrete commitment to feeding the hungry is not, for example, relative to its ability to satisfy my desires for money, prestige, etc., such that, if it failed to satisfy these desires, I would be justified in breaking it. Rather, my desires for money, prestige, etc., are relative to my concrete commitment. If there is a conflict between the two, I must sacrifice the satisfaction of my desires for the sake of my commitment. This unconditional aspect of concrete commitments is what Anti-Climacus means by the "infinite". Thus, in describing the proper relationship between infinite and finite, Anti-Climacus says that "...the self is a synthesis in which the finite is the limiting factor and the infinite is the limitless factor". (SUD 163) Insofar as my commitments are definite and determinate, they are limited and insofar as they are unconditional, they are limitless.

Once we have stated the issue of infinite and finite, we can state the issue of possibility and necessity in relation to it. Anti-Climacus does this as follows:

The self is composed of infinitude and finitude. But the synthesis is a relationship, and it is a relationship which, though it is derived, relates itself to itself, which means freedom. The self is freedom. But freedom is the dialectical element in the terms possibility and necessity. (SUD 162)

We can understand what Anti-Climacus means here if we see how having concrete commitments involves having the proper relationship between possibility and necessity. Insofar as my concrete commitments define me, they are necessary to me, such that I would not be the person I am without them. I am the individual who is committed to feeding these particular hungry people. If I lose or abandon this commitment, I lose by identity. If my concrete commitments do not have this kind of necessity, they do not define me. But insofar as I am self-defining-- insofar as it is, in some sense, up to me to determine my concrete commitments-- it cannot be the case that I have to have the particular concrete commitments I do have. Possibility, for Anti-Climacus, means that my identity could have been and could again be different. I am the individual who is committed to feeding these particular hungry people. But I do not have to have this particular commitment. If my concrete commitments do not have this kind of possibility, I am not self-defining.

Thus, Anti-Climacus sums up the relationship between possibility and necessity as follows:

Just as finitude is the limiting factor in relation to infinitude , so in relation to possibility it is necessity which serves as a check.... The self...is just as possible as it is necessary; for though it is itself, it has to become itself. Inasmuch as it is itself, it is the necessary, and inasmuch as it has to become itself, it is a possibility. (SUD 168)

Insofar as my concrete commitments define me, I have

necessity. Insofar as it is up to me to determine my concrete commitments, I have possibility. Freedom, in other words, consists in my being self-defined. Insofar as I am defined, I have necessity. Insofar as I am self-defined, I have possibility.

With this statement of the issue of possibility and necessity we are in a position to state the issue of the eternal and the temporal. Vigilius Haufniensis himself makes the connection between the two issues when he says that the issue of the eternal and the temporal is the issue of "historical freedom". (CA 85, emphasis mine) To have free concrete commitments is to have both discontinuity between my present, my past and my future-- the temporal-- and continuity between my present, my past and my future-- the eternal. Haufniensis describes this relationship between the temporal and the eternal as follows:

The pivotal concept in Christianity, that which made all things new, is the fullness of time, but the fullness of time is the moment as the eternal, and yet this eternal is also the future and the past. If attention is not paid to this, not a single concept can be saved from a heretical and treasonable admixture that annihilates the concept. One does not get the past by itself but in a simple continuity with the future (with this the concepts of conversion, atonement and redemption are lost in the world-historical significance and lost in the individual historical development). The future is not by itself but in a simple continuity with the present (thereby the concepts of resurrection and judgement are destroyed). (CA 90)

For our present purposes, the importance of this passage lies in Haufniensis' assertion that Christianity posits both discontinuity and continuity between present, past and future. While Christianity posits continuity between present, past and future, the continuity it posits is not "simple continuity" but a continuity which assumes the existence of discontinuity. We can understand what Haufniensis means here if we interpret this passage in the light of Anti-Climacus' assertion that the task of becoming a self and the task of becoming a Christian-- of having a relationship to God-- are the same task and that this task involves having concrete commitments. When I freely assume my concrete commitments, I gain the distinction between my present and my past. My present is defined by the presence of concrete commitments while my past is defined by their absence. I also gain the distinction between my present and my future. While my present is defined by the presence of concrete commitments, it is always an open question whether I will sustain these concrete commitments in the future. In this sense, the future is always outstanding and never can be assumed to be in simple continuity with my present. Thus, to freely assume concrete commitments is to have the temporal; it is to have discontinuity between present, past and future.

But to freely assume concrete commitments is, equally, to have continuity between present, past and future-- the eternal. Because, as we shall see, the failure to have

concrete commitments in the past is always my own, when I freely assume my concrete commitments I take responsibility for my failure to have them in the past. In owning up to the past as my past, I acknowledge the continuity between my present and my past. Similarly, because, as we shall see, it is always up to me whether I will sustain my concrete commitments in the future, when I freely assume my concrete commitments, I take responsibility for my future. In owning up to the future as my future, I acknowledge the continuity between my present and my future.

In sum, to have historical freedom means to have both discontinuity and continuity between present, past and future. Insofar as I have discontinuity, or the temporal, I have possibility-- in freely assuming my concrete commitments I become a different person from the person I was in the past and I recognize that I could again become a different person in the future. Insofar as I have continuity, or the eternal, I have necessity-- in freely assuming my concrete commitments I acknowledge that I am the same person who lacked these commitments in the past and who is responsible for sustaining them in the future.

To sum up, then, the three issues which a human being must confront if he or she is to become a self are as follows: The issue of infinite and finite is the issue of having concrete commitments which are both definite and

determinate and unconditional. The issue of possibility and necessity is the issue of having concrete commitments which both define me and are up to me. The issue of the eternal and the temporal is the issue of having discontinuity between present, past and future insofar as my concrete commitments are up to me and continuity between present, past and future insofar as my concrete commitments define me.

3

Having thus defined the three issues which a human being must confront if he or she is to become a self, our next task is to substantiate our claim that the present age is the present age precisely insofar as it both covers up these three issues and creates the illusion of having resolved them. In their discussions of the factors of the synthesis in, respectively, The Sickness Unto Death and The Concept of Anxiety, Anti-Climacus and Vigilius Haufniensis show how the present age collapses the distinctions between the factors of synthesis. In the opening section of The Present Age, Kierkegaard shows how the present age creates the illusion of these distinctions in the absence of these distinctions.

One prefatory remark is in order before proceeding to our discussion of these sources. In their descriptions of the collapse of the distinctions between the factors of the synthesis, Anti-Climacus and Vigilius Haufniensis do not use the term "the present age". Instead, they use the more general term "spiritlessness". As we know from Anti-Climacus' definition of the self, "spirit" and "self" are synonymous: "Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is self". (SUD 146) If to have spirit is to

confront the three issues which we have described, then to be spiritless must mean to avoid confronting these issues. That "spiritlessness" and "the present age" are two names for the same phenomenon-- that the present age is the particular modern version of a more general phenomenon-- we will demonstrate by showing that Kierkegaard's description of the present age allows us to make sense of the descriptions of spiritlessness in The Sickness Unto Death and The Concept of Anxiety.

Similarly, Kierkegaard does not use the terms "infinite" and "finite", "possibility" and "necessity" and "eternal" and "temporal" when he describes the way in which the present age creates the illusion of distinctions in the absence of distinctions. But we will demonstrate that the present age does, in fact, create the illusion of the existence of these particular distinctions by showing how these distinctions allow us to make sense of the opening section of The Present Age.

Anti-Climacus defines spiritlessness-- or, as he chooses to call it in this passage, "worldliness"-- as the collapse of the distinction between infinite and finite: "...worldliness means precisely attributing infinite value to the indifferent". It means "...having lost oneself...by being entirely finitized, by having become, instead of a self, a number, just one man more..." (SUD 166)

To attribute infinite value to the indifferent is to attribute unconditional significance to the insignificant. For people in the present age, what makes an infinite difference is that nothing finite makes any difference. If people in the present age have an unconditional commitment, in other words, it is an unconditional commitment to having no unconditional commitments. But while having no unconditional finite commitments would seem to be the ultimate expression of one's infinitude, it, in fact, is an expression of the most inhuman form of finitude. Since no particular commitment makes a difference to anyone, no one is differentiated from anyone else by his or her particular commitments. Because human beings thus are not qualitatively distinct from each other, they are only quantitatively or numerically distinct. In having an unconditional commitment to having no unconditional commitments, people in the present age have neither the finite nor the infinite.

Anti-Climacus' discussion of spiritlessness'-- or, as he calls it in this passage, "Philistinism's"-- collapse of the distinction between possibility and necessity parallels his discussion of its collapse of the distinction between infinite and finite:

Philistinism is spiritlessness.... For philistinism thinks it is in control of possibility, it thinks that when it has decoyed this prodigious elasticity into the field of probability or into the mad-house it holds it a prisoner; it carries possibility around like a prisoner in the cage of the probable, shows it off, imagines itself to be the master, does not

take note that precisely thereby it has taken itself captive to be the slave of spiritlessness and to be the most pitiful of all things. (SUD 174-175)

As we saw above, possibility means that the concrete commitments which define me are, in some sense, up to me. They are not completely determined for me either by my past life or by conditions in the external world. Rather, I assume them freely. But if this is the case, concrete commitments involve responsibility and risk. I cannot blame my past or the world for my concrete commitments. I may commit myself to a project which is misguided or to a person who betrays me. My project may fail or the person to whom I am committed may die. In order to avoid such responsibility and risk, people in the present age substitute probability for possibility. They undertake projects which, according to their calculations, have the best chance of success and forego those projects which have the least chance of success. They never commit themselves so definitively that they cannot extricate themselves from their commitments if their calculations prove to be faulty or if the external circumstances upon which they based their calculations change.

Now, just as having an unconditional commitment to having no unconditional commitments appeared to be the highest expression of infinitude but was really the lowest expression of finitude, so living in terms of the probable can appear to be the highest expression of possibility but is, in fact, the lowest expression of necessity. Living in

terms of the probable appears to be the highest expression of possibility because I keep all of my options open and never allow myself to become so identified with any single option that I cannot abandon it when the odds go against it. But, in living my life in terms of the probable, I am, in fact, a slave to the most impoverished form of necessity. I do not have the necessity of a concrete commitment which, while freely assumed, defines me. Rather, I am a slave to probability. Because my actions are determined solely by what may or may not work, the conditions of my action are always outside myself and never derive from myself. In making me a slave to external circumstances, present age probability thus collapses the distinction between possibility and necessity.

Finally, Vigilius Haufniensis describes spiritlessness' collapse of the distinction between the eternal and the temporal as follows:

It really knows no distinction between the present, the past, the future, and the eternal. Its life and its history go on crabbedly like the writing in ancient manuscripts, without any punctuation marks, one word, one sentence after the other. (CA 94)

Haufniensis' description of the collapse of the distinction between the eternal and the temporal follows directly from Anti-Climacus' descriptions of the collapse of the distinctions between infinite and finite and

possibility and necessity. Because people in the present age do not have concrete commitments, they do not have the discontinuity between the present, which is defined by the presence of their concrete commitments; the past, which is defined by the absence of their concrete commitments; and the future, which is defined by the issue of whether or not they will sustain their concrete commitments. And because people in the present age do not have concrete commitments, they do not have the continuity between the present, in which they are defined by their concrete commitments; the past, in which they were responsible for having lacked them; and the future, in which they will be responsible for sustaining them. Instead of having both discontinuity and continuity between present, past and future, people in the present age have both more radical discontinuity and more radical continuity. They have radical discontinuity because they can change their commitments at any moment. Because they are committed to keeping their options open and to doing what has a chance of success, they must be open to continual change. Indeed, in some quarters of the present age, openness to change is considered to be the very essence of modernity. But this total discontinuity is also total continuity. Since no particular commitment makes any unconditional difference to anyone but, rather, all particular commitments are similarly indifferent; and since no particular commitment involves any risk but, rather, all commitments are similarly calculated, people in

the present age really are involved in doing the same thing over and over again. What looks like unending change is really endless repetition. Thus, the discontinuity which people in the present age experience is not the discontinuity of the temporal-- of the present, past and future-- but of different moments-- whether they be a second or twenty years-- succeeding each other with no connection between them. The continuity which people in the present age experience is not the continuity of the eternal-- of present, past, and future-- but of different moments which are really all the same.

To sum up, then: the present age, according to Anti-Climacus and Vigilius Haufniensis, is spiritless precisely insofar as it collapses the distinctions between the factors of the synthesis. In attributing infinite value to the indifferent, it collapses the distinction between infinite and finite. In turning possibility into probability, it collapses the distinction between possibility and necessity. And in making the eternal synonymous with endless repetition, it collapses the distinction between the eternal and the temporal and lends new credence to the notion that the more things change, the more they remain the same.

Having thus illustrated how the present age collapses the distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal, we have only one more task to accomplish in the remainder of this chapter. As we saw in Kierkegaard's description of the collapse of the individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions in The Present Age, the present age is not content simply to collapse qualitative distinctions. Rather, the age derives much of its seductiveness from its ability to create the illusion of the existence of the very distinctions it is in the process of destroying. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that, just as the present age creates the illusions of the distinctions between private and public, form and content, revelation and concealment and subjectivity and objectivity, so it also creates the illusions of the distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal. Kierkegaard's description of the creation of the illusion of these latter distinctions occurs in the opening section of The Present Age.

Kierkegaard describes the present age's creation of the illusion of the distinction between infinite and finite

as follows:

Among the young men of today a profound and prodigious learning is almost unthinkable; they would find it ridiculous. On the other hand a scientific virtuoso might draw up a subscription form outlining an all-embracing system which he purposed to write and, what is more, in such a way that the reader would feel he had already read the system; for the age of encyclopaedists, when men wrote gigantic folios with unremitting pains, is gone. Now is the turn of those light-weight encyclopaedists who, en passant, deal with all the sciences and the whole of existence. Equally unthinkable among the young men of today is a truly religious renunciation of the world, adhered to with daily self-denial. On the other hand almost any theological student is capable of something far more wonderful. He could found a society with the sole object of saving all those who are lost. The age of great and good actions is past, the present is the age of anticipation when even recognition is received in advance. No one is satisfied with doing something definite, every one wants to feel flattered by reflection with the illusion of having discovered at the very least a new continent. (PA 35-36)

Although he does not specifically refer to them here, the media provide some of the best examples of what Kierkegaard means by "light-weight encyclopaedists who, en passant, deal with all the sciences and the whole of existence" and by societies "with the sole object of saving all those who are lost". For an example of the former-- an example which also indicates that the definitive symptoms of the present age have, if anything, become more pronounced in the one hundred and fifty years since Kierkegaard first diagnosed them-- we need look no further than weekly news magazines such as Time and Newsweek. As we can observe simply by glancing at their section headings--

"World", "Nation", "Religion", "Science", "Art", etc.-- these magazines unabashedly claim to be "all-embracing" and to "deal with all the sciences and the whole of existence". Indeed, if a person from an earlier age were able to take a glance at the table of contents of one of these magazines, he or she undoubtedly would be impressed by the breadth and depth of knowledge represented there. But Kierkegaard's reference to these encyclopaedic efforts as "lightweight" is meant to call our attention precisely to the fact that these magazines purchase breadth at the expense of depth. While they cover a wide variety of different subjects, they accord each subject the same superficial treatment. All cultural phenomena-- from rock stars to revolutions, from computers to cults-- are treated as fads and are discussed either with a tone of detached bemusement which says that this, too, shall pass or with a tone of exaggerated seriousness which attempts to milk the phenomenon for all the coverage it can produce during its brief tenure under the media spotlight. It is no wonder that, as Kierkegaard says, we feel that we have read the magazine simply by subscribing for, in a sense, we have. Though we do not know what this week's particular topics will be, we do know the general attitude which will be taken towards them. And this is all we need to know since, in the case of these magazines, attitude, and not analysis, is the name of the game.

For a media example of "societies with the sole object

of saving all those who are lost", we need look no further than the Christian television networks which have sprung up and grown so quickly in recent years. Just as the appeal of weekly news magazines derives from their efforts to inform their readership about every current event and issue, so Christian broadcasting derives much of its appeal from its effort to reach every individual unredeemed soul. Indeed, one Christian broadcaster has gone so far as to say that it was a definite shortcoming of Christ's ministry that he did not have the tools of mass communication available to him and has speculated on how much more Christ could have accomplished if he had been able to spread the gospel with the aid of the modern media. Kierkegaard's attitude towards these efforts is, of course, quite different. Just as weekly news magazines purchase breadth at the expense of depth, so Christian broadcasting purchases quantity at the expense of quality. It is unlikely that, in the vast majority of cases, salvation by television produces the deep qualitative change in an individual life which, for Kierkegaard, is the hallmark of Christian conversion. Instead, it is more likely to produce superficial professions of faith which have as much to do with "a truly religious renunciation of the world, adhered to with daily self-denial" as the "Religion" section of Time magazine has to do with the Summa Theologica.

Having discussed both of these examples in general

terms, we now must show how they create the illusion of the distinction between infinite and finite while destroying the distinction. Magazines like Time and Newsweek can appear to embody the distinction between infinite and finite. Insofar as they deal with definite, determinate subjects, they have the finite; insofar as they deal with an unlimited number of subjects, they have the infinite. The appearance of the distinction, however, is merely that-- an appearance. Though Time and Newsweek appear to discuss definite, determinate subjects, they discuss each different subject in exactly the same way. But to discuss each different subject in exactly the same way is to admit that there are no significant differences between the subjects being discussed. To have no significant differences between particular subjects is to have no particular subjects and thus to have no finitude.

Similarly, although Time and Newsweek appear to have the infinite insofar as they set no limits upon the kind or number of subjects they will consider, the appearance of the infinite is, again, only an appearance. To have the infinite is, as we have seen, to have an unconditional concrete commitment, a commitment to which all other interests are subordinated or even sacrificed. But Time and Newsweek do not sacrifice their breadth of coverage-- not for more than a single edition, anyway, when an event such as a war or an assassination temporarily pushes other events to the back pages-- for the sake of devoting

detailed consideration to a particular issue which they take to be of overriding importance. Particular issues are never of overriding importance. What is always of overriding importance is that every particular issue, no matter how great or how small, take up its pre-determined place in the magazine.

Like weekly news magazines, television evangelism also creates the illusion of the distinction between infinite and finite while destroying the distinction. Television evangelism appears to have the finite insofar as it claims to address itself to particular individuals in need of personal salvation. It appears to have the infinite insofar as the intention and-- at least, potentially, with the aid of satellites and such, the realization-- of its outreach is global in scope. Once again, however, appearances are deceptive. Just as Time and Newsweek address each supposedly different topic in exactly the same manner, so television evangelism addresses each different individual for whom God supposedly has particular concern in exactly the same way. Just as Time and Newsweek fail to sacrifice breadth of coverage for the sake of in-depth coverage of a particularly critical issue, so it is difficult to imagine many television evangelists sacrificing their global aspirations and their global celebrity for the sake of ministering to particular individuals in conditions of relative obscurity, as Jesus himself did. Instead, they are "flattered by reflection"--

in this case, their own reflection beaming out of television screens across the world-- "with the illusion" of having saved "at the very least a...continent".

Kierkegaard's description of the way in which the present age creates the illusion of the distinctions between possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal begins by contrasting the present age with a revolutionary age:

A revolutionary age is an age of action; our is the age of advertisement and publicity. Nothing ever happens but there is immediate publicity everywhere. In the present age a rebellion is, of all things, the most unthinkable. Such an expression of strength would seem ridiculous to the calculating intelligence of our times. On the other hand a political virtuoso might bring off a feat almost as remarkable. He might write a manifesto suggesting a general assembly at which people should decide upon a rebellion, and it would be so carefully worded that even the censor would let it pass. At the meeting itself he would be able to create the impression that his audience had rebelled, after which they would all go quietly home-- having spent a very pleasant evening. (PA 35)

For those of us who began to come of political age in a time when one made revolution during the day and came home in time to watch oneself on television at night, Kierkegaard's description cannot fail to arouse acute embarrassment. But even in a time which does not claim to be revolutionary-- a time which, indeed, prides itself upon having disclaimed the excesses of the sixties-- we can

discover phenomena which correspond to Kierkegaard's description. Once again, as Kierkegaard's reference to the present age as "an age of advertisement and publicity" indicates, the media provide the best examples of these phenomena. Thus, when the media cover elections, there is a tremendous amount of speculation just before the event about the great changes which are about to occur and there is a tremendous amount of analysis just after the event about the great changes which have just occurred. Soon after the election is over, however, it becomes clear that all that has occurred is the publicity itself. The details of the transition to a new administration are treated like any other news story while the media anxiously await the next great media event.

Political events are not, of course, the only kinds of media events. We need only think of the tremendous amount of publicity which precedes the Superbowl-- publicity which completely overshadows the game itself and, probably, rightfully so, since the game itself is usually a rather dull affair which is forgotten almost as soon as it is played. Or we need only think back to the tremendous amount of publicity which preceded the last tour of the United States by the Rolling Stones-- publicity which, again, managed to provide a convenient cover for the fact that the actual music played on the tour was, as evidenced from the recording and the film of the concerts, mediocre at best and awful at worst. In both cases, the publicity

before the event leads us to believe that our world will be different after the event. After the event, no one can remember what all the excitement was about.

Having thus provided some contemporary parallels for Kierkegaard's examples of the present age's creation of the illusion of the distinctions between possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal, we still must explain exactly how these examples are examples of the creation of illusory distinctions. The illusion of necessity is the illusion that the events in question determine our individual and cultural identities; that election returns or the Superbowl or the Stones are sources of individual and cultural self-definition. The illusion of possibility is the illusion that we have become different individuals and a different culture as a result of these events. These illusions, however, are precisely that-- illusions. The events in question cannot be sources of individual or cultural self-definition because they are not real events but mere occasions for advertisement and publicity. And the events in question cannot make us different individuals or a different culture because, as mere occasions for advertisement and publicity, they substitute changes in appearance for changes in reality. Thus, in a general description of the present age's creation of the illusion of the distinction between possibility and necessity, Kierkegaard says:

To judge from innumerable indications, one would conclude that something quite exceptional

had either just happened or was just about to happen. Yet any such conclusion would be quite wrong. Indications are, indeed, the only achievements of the age; and its skill and inventiveness in constructing fascinating illusions, its bursts of enthusiasm, using as a deceitful escape some projected change of form, must be rated as high in the scale of cleverness and of the negative use of strength as the passionate, creative energy of the revolution in the corresponding scale of energy. (PA 34)

Insofar as the creation of the illusion of the distinction between possibility and necessity involves the creation of the illusion that something has just happened or is just about to happen, the creation of the illusion of the distinction between possibility and necessity obviously is related to the creation of the illusion of the distinction between the eternal and the temporal. Having given examples of the creation of the former illusion, we can show fairly easily how these same examples involve the creation of the latter illusion as well. The examples we have described create the illusion of change and therefore of discontinuity. The publicity which precedes media events holds out the promise of a future which, changed by the event in question, will be radically different from the present and will thus relegate the present to the past. At the same time, these events create the illusion of the eternal insofar as they create the illusion of permanence and therefore of continuity. The very fact that the media assess the predicted changes before they occur and analyze them after they occur with the same vocabulary and the same set of categories indicates that the supposed changes have

not been so radical after all.

Needless to say, these ersatz versions of the temporal and the eternal are poor substitutes for the genuine articles. Because the significance of an event resides not in the event itself but in its function as an occasion for pre- and post-event publicity, the event cannot serve as a watershed between the past and the future. Indeed, precisely because there are no events of decisive significance, there can be no distinction between present, past and future. Because we cannot make distinctions between significant and insignificant events, we cannot make a distinction between a past which is past precisely insofar as it has been superseded by a significant event and a future which is future precisely insofar as it has been made possible by the significant event. But if there is no distinction between present, past and future, there cannot be that continuity between present, past and future which is the eternal. The continuity of the present age is not the continuity which derives from a recognition of the fact that, despite the changes which great events have brought about, we are, in some sense, the same people we were in the past and that our future, in addition to transforming our past, continues it. Instead, the continuity of the present age is the continuity of an endless succession of media events which are all the same.

Obviously, we could provide many more examples of the way in which the present age both levels, and creates the illusions of, the distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal. The point of bringing in these examples, however, was to support our claim that Kierkegaard does, in fact, see the levelling, and the creation of the illusion, of the distinctions between the factors of the synthesis as definitive of the present age. But if these phenomena really are definitive of the present age, the question which confronts us is the following: If the present age both levels and creates the illusion of these distinctions, so that a person cannot turn to the age for help in expressing them, how can a human being ever become a self? Indeed, to press the question back even further, if the present age completely covers up the issue of the self, how would a human being ever become aware of the issue and thus of the inadequacies of the present age?

Kierkegaard's hints as to the answers to these questions occur right in the middle of the opening impressionistic section of The Present Age which we have just been discussing. Kierkegaard says:

There is no more action or decision in our day than there is perilous delight in swimming in shallow waters. But just as a grown-up, struggling delightedly in the waves, calls to those younger than himself: 'Come on, jump in quickly'-- the decision in existence, so to speak (of course it is in the individual), calls out to the young who are not yet worn out by over-reflective thought or overburdened by the illusions of reflective thought: Come on, leap

cheerfully, even if it means a light-hearted leap, so long as it is decisive. If you are capable of being a man, then danger and the harsh judgement of existence on your thoughtlessness will help you to become one. (PA 36-37)

Kierkegaard's answer to our second question is that the "decision in existence" calls to the individual to overcome the levelling illusions of the present age and to become a self. Having described the "decision in existence"-- or, in our terminology, the issues which confront a human being who wants to become a self-- in the beginning of this chapter, we are in a position to understand what Kierkegaard means here. Because each person has the capacity to express the distinctions between the factors of the synthesis, a person will be dissatisfied with the present age to the extent that he or she realizes that the present age inhibits his or her expression of these distinctions. The present age may cover up the existence of the issues confronting a human being, in other words, but it cannot do away with the issues.

Insofar as the present age does cover up the issues, however, it offers no help to the person who wants to become a self. In order to become a self, therefore, such a person must be willing to decide to live on completely different terms from those which the present age offers. This is why overcoming the present age involves a leap. There is no simple transition, no mediation, between denying the decision in existence and confronting it.

As we saw at the conclusion of the last chapter, the

only leap which Kierkegaard believes will solve the problem of the present age is the leap into the arms of God. In the passage we cited above, however, Kierkegaard does not call for a leap into the arms of God. Rather, he calls simply for a leap out of the present age, "even if it means a light-hearted leap, so long as it is decisive". The light-hearted leap is the leap into the aesthetic sphere of existence. To that sphere we now turn.

CHAPTER III:
THE AESTHETIC

The work which describes the aesthetic sphere of existence, Either/Or, Volume I, presents a problem of interpretation which the works describing the other spheres do not. Unlike "Equilibrium Between the Aesthetical and the Ethical in the Composition of Personality", the long letter in Volume II which describes the ethical sphere of existence, or the sermons which describe Religiousness A, the essays which comprise the first volume of Either/Or are private papers which their author did not intend to publish. Victor Eremita, the pseudonymous editor of the two volumes of Either/Or, claims in his Preface to the two volumes to have discovered the papers in a desk drawer. Not knowing their author's name, he assigns to him the name "A". Not knowing the order in which the pieces are to be read, he publishes them in the order in which he found them in the desk drawer.

It is the task of an interpreter, if not of an editor like Victor Eremita, to attempt to bring order out of chaos by determining how each of the eight pieces in the first volume of Either/Or contributes to our understanding of the aesthetic sphere of existence. This chapter will argue that the eight pieces can be ordered chronologically and that each piece represents a different stage of the

aesthetic sphere of existence. Beginning with "The Immediate Stages of the Erotic or the Musical Erotic" and ending with "The Unhappiest Man", the eight pieces in Either/Or, Volume I, are the record of one individual's failed attempt to overcome the despair of the present age by committing himself to increasingly reflective versions of a life of immediate experience.

Before proceeding to our interpretation of A's works, however, it is important to say a few words about Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms in the works describing three of the four spheres of existence-- the aesthetic, the ethical and Religiousness B. Kierkegaard discusses this issue, as well as the related issue of his use of what he terms "indirect discourse", in his retrospective review of his authorship, The Point of View for My Work as an Author: A Report to History. According to Kierkegaard, his use of pseudonyms in the works describing the aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence is intended to prevent the reader from identifying these spheres with particular individuals. In the cases of the aesthetic and ethical spheres, it is absolutely crucial that we refrain from making this identification, since, as we shall see, each of these spheres requires that individuals express their particular differentiating characteristics through their existence in the sphere. Thus, Judge William, the

pseudonym who writes from the perspective of the ethical sphere, expresses his particular talents through his calling as a judge. If Kierkegaard used the life of an actual judge to describe the ethical sphere, he would run the risk of our identifying being a judge as an essential requirement for being in the ethical sphere. By describing the ethical sphere through a fictional judge, Kierkegaard insures that we do not identify the particular traits which Judge William expresses in the ethical sphere with the ethical sphere itself.

We can better understand Kierkegaard's rationale for the use of pseudonyms to describe the aesthetic and ethical spheres if we understand his rationale for writing under his own name when he describes Religiousness A. Religiousness A, as we shall see, involves what Kierkegaard calls "self-annihilation before God". Its goal, in contrast to the goals of the aesthetic and ethical spheres, is precisely not to be a differentiated individual. But if a person's particular differentiating characteristics play no role in his existence in Religiousness A, there is no danger that we will identify the sphere with the expression of any particular characteristics-- including Kierkegaard's. Contrary to popular belief, in other words, Kierkegaard does not use his own name in the Religiousness A works because he wants us to identify him as existing in that sphere. Kierkegaard uses his own name precisely because, if we really understand what it means to exist in

Religiousness A, we understand that it annihilates individual differences and that the particular differentiating characteristics of the individual describing the sphere can therefore play no role in his existence in the sphere. Thus, in accounting for his use of pseudonyms to describe the aesthetic and ethical spheres and his use of his own name to describe Religiousness A, Kierkegaard says:

In every one of the pseudonymous works this theme of 'the individual' comes to evidence in one way or another; but there the individual is predominantly the pre-eminent individual in the aesthetic sense, the distinguished person, &c. In every one of my edifying works the theme of 'the individual' comes to evidence, and as officially as possible; but there the individual is what every man is or can be. The starting point of the pseudonyms is the difference between man and man with respect to intellect, culture, &c; the starting point of the edifying works is the edifying thought of the universal-human. (PV 124)

Though Kierkegaard's use of his own name in the works which describe Religiousness A is not intended to inform us that Kierkegaard exists in that sphere, Kierkegaard does, in fact, claim to exist in Religiousness A. He does so, however, by way of indicating that Religiousness A is not the highest sphere of existence and that the highest sphere of existence, Religiousness B, is again represented by a pseudonym, Anti-Climacus.

Later, however, there appeared a new pseudonym, Anti-Climacus. But the very fact that he is a pseudonym indicates (as the name Anti-Climacus itself indicates) that he is rather to be regarded as a signal of arrest. All the earlier pseudonyms are lower than the 'edifying

author'; the new pseudonym represents a higher pseudonymity. It is to be understood, however, that the 'arrest' is accomplished by pointing out a higher ideal, with the consequence of forcing me back within the bounds of my limitations, condemning me because my life does not correspond to so lofty a claim, so that of necessity the communication is a poetic one. (PV 142)

As we shall see, Religiousness B, like the aesthetic and the ethical spheres, involves individual differentiation, though of a very different type than that which the two lower spheres involve. Thus, once again, Kierkegaard uses a pseudonym in order to insure that we not identify a particular individual with the sphere.

The distinction between the works in which Kierkegaard employs what he terms "indirect discourse" and the works in which he employs what he terms "direct discourse" is the same as the distinction between the pseudonymous works and the works written in Kierkegaard's own name. As Kierkegaard says, "the direct religious communication bore my own name". (PV 145) In Training In Christianity, Anti-Climacus indicates that there are two type of indirect discourse. The first type, as we shall see, is that of the aesthetic and ethical works; the second type is that of the Religiousness B works. Because we will only be in a position to understand what indirect discourse means in the Religiousness B works once we have understood the three lower spheres of existence, we will not discuss it here. However, we must discuss what indirect discourse means in the aesthetic and ethical spheres, for we are about to

encounter it for the first time in A's writings.

As we saw in the last chapter, Anti-Climacus claims, in The Sickness Unto Death, that each of the three lower spheres of existence defines the factors of the synthesis in such a way that they negate rather than reinforce each other. To define the factors of the synthesis in such a way that they negate each other is to be in despair. As we shall see, people who are in despair have a vested interest in concealing their despair from themselves. Thus, they have a tendency to try to use the very contradictions which undermine their positions to try to save their positions. As a result, we can never take any of their defenses of their positions at face value for, as Anti-Climacus says, what they take to be defense may, in fact, be attack, and vice versa. Thus,

This art consists in reducing oneself, the communicator, to nobody, something purely objective, and then incessantly composing qualitative opposites into unity.... An example of such indirect communication is....to bring defence and attack together in such a unity that no one can say directly whether one is attacking or defending, so that both the most zealous partisans of the cause and its bitterest enemies can regard one as an ally-- and with this to be nobody, an absentee, an objective something, not a personal man. (TC 132-133)

Indirect discourse in the aesthetic and ethical works, then, means that every act of self-revelation is, at the same time, an act of self-concealment. It would seem, then, that Kierkegaard's use of direct discourse in the Religiousness A works indicates not that Religiousness A is

without contradictions but, rather, that Kierkegaard is lucidly aware of the contradictions of Religiousness A. However, so long as Kierkegaard is in Religiousness A, we cannot take any of the claims he makes for Religiousness A at face value-- including the claim that he is describing it directly. Kierkegaard's use of his own name to describe Religiousness A, then, and his claim to be describing Religiousness A directly are of a piece. Both of them make Kierkegaard's personal relationship to Religiousness A completely inscrutable and force the reader to come to terms with the claims and contradictions of the sphere herself rather than relying upon the authority of the author.

With this brief account of the reasons for Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms and indirect discourse, we are in a position to turn to the pseudonymous works themselves. Only as we examine Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms and indirect discourse in his descriptions of the spheres will we come to a genuine understanding of their functions. We turn, then, to the pseudonym "A" and the first volume of Either/Or.

1

"The Immediate Stages of the Erotic or
the Musical Erotic"

If the present age represents an attempt to cover up the issue of the self, the first stage of the aesthetic sphere of existence represents an attempt to do away with the self all together. "The Immediate Stages of the Erotic" is the record of A's attempt to lose himself through his passionate commitment to music-- specifically, to Mozart's Don Juan. As such, it is the record of A's attempt to overcome the levelling of the present age, for, as A says, it is Mozart "...to whom I owe it that I did not pass through life without having been stirred by something....if he were taken away, if his name were erased from the memory of men, then would the last pillar be overthrown, which for me has kept everything from being hurled together into boundless chaos, into fearful nothingness". (E/O I, 47)

How can the attempt to lose oneself be an attempt to overcome the levelling of the present age? Why is this attempt ultimately unsuccessful? In order to answer these questions, we must do two things. To answer the first question, we must show what the character of Don Juan

represents for A. To answer the second question, we must show why A does not try to become a Don Juan himself but instead attempts to experience Don Juan vicariously through music.

Don Juan, for A, represents an absolute commitment to enjoyment. As such, he is the extreme antithesis of the present age. As we saw in Chapter I, the present age is defined by the levelling of social, hierarchical qualitative distinctions and by the covering up of the possibility of individual, egalitarian qualitative distinctions. If dispassionate reflection is the cause of the levelling and the covering up of qualitative distinctions, it makes sense that a person who wanted to resist the present age by expressing qualitative distinctions in his or her life would turn to something as qualitatively different from dispassionate reflection as possible as the source of his qualitative distinctions. What could be more different from dispassionate reflection than passionate enjoyment? Or, as the motto which introduces Volume I of Either/Or asks rhetorically, "Are passions, then, the pagans of the soul? Reason alone baptized?" (E/O I, 1)

The aesthete, then, passionately commits himself to enjoyment. In so doing, he gains a qualitative distinction-- the distinction between the enjoyable and the unenjoyable-- or, in the case of the more reflective type of aesthete whom we will discuss later on in this chapter,

between the interesting and the boring.

Now, it is of crucial importance to recognize just how qualitatively different life lived under the aegis of this distinction in the aesthetic sphere is from life lived under the aegis of the covering up of qualitative distinctions in the present age. The failure to recognize this difference pervades the scholarship of Kierkegaard. Most commentators simply make no distinction between the present age and the aesthetic sphere of existence. Their failure to make such a distinction is not wholly without warrant. People in the present age do enjoy themselves. But the crucial point, for Kierkegaard, is that they do not commit themselves passionately to enjoyment and that they therefore are not in the aesthetic sphere of existence.

In other words, there is a qualitative difference between the present age and the aesthetic sphere of existence (between not having qualitative distinctions and having them) as well as a qualitative difference between each of the different spheres (between different sets of qualitative distinctions). This is why Kierkegaard calls the transition from the present age to the aesthetic sphere of existence and from one sphere of existence to another a "leap". The failure to grasp this point is, as we shall see, responsible for many of the most persistent misunderstandings in the literature on Kierkegaard-- misunderstandings which are extremely detrimental to an appreciation of the significance of Kierkegaard's thought

because they fail to recognize the originality of the notion of spheres of existence.

Don Juan, then, is, for A, the exemplar of passionate commitment to enjoyment. As such, he is the exemplar of passionate commitment to the satisfaction of desire. But if passionate commitment to enjoyment means passionate commitment to the satisfaction of desire, it is necessary to understand what desire is in order to understand what it could mean to be passionately committed to its satisfaction. A analyzes the concept of desire by analyzing desire-- or its absence-- in the Page in Figaro and Papageno in The Magic Flute.

Now, it is important to note that A's account of the stages of desire does not claim to be a genetic account but is, rather, an attempt to break down the concept of desire analytically into its constituent elements: "The other stages have no independent existence; in and of themselves they exist only as parts of a conceptual scheme..." (E/O I, 73). Nevertheless, these elements bear both a striking similarity to and striking differences from the genetic stages of desire as described by the greatest psychologist of the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud. By comparing A's conceptual stages with Freud's genetic stages, we should be able to illuminate basic differences in the approach to the issue of the self and to show how opting for a conceptual

or a genetic account of the stages of desire reflects these differences.

Finally, it is important to note, at the beginning of this discussion, A's remark that the stages of desire are not stages of consciousness: "Above all, however, one must avoid considering them as different degrees of consciousness, since even the last stage has not yet arrived at consciousness; I have always to do only with the immediate in its sheer immediacy". (E/O I, 73) The reasons for distinguishing between stages of desire and stages of consciousness will become evident during the course of this discussion. It is important to mention the distinction here because it accounts for A's-- and my-- odd locutions which will make desire rather than an individual the subject of the following descriptions.

In the first stage, represented by the Page in Figaro, "Desire possesses what will become its object, but possesses it without having desired it, and so does not possess it". (E/O I, 74) In other words, desire is only determinate as desire if it is desire for a determinate object. The existence of a desire for a determinate object, in turn, presupposes the existence of a separation between the desire and the object. Desire desires the object precisely because it does not possess it. But if there is no separation between desire and object-- if desire possesses the object before it can desire it-- desire does not exist: "...desire in this stage is not

qualified as desire...this nascent desire, so far as its object is concerned, is entirely undefined".(E/O I, 75)

We can translate A's description of this first stage of desire-- or, rather, of the non-existence of desire-- into genetic terms. Indeed, A's own metaphors are helpful in making the translation. In attempting to describe the desire which cannot be satisfied because it is not desire, A says: "It sucks, like Thor, through a horn whose point is buried in the sea; yet the reason why it cannot draw its object to it is not that it is infinite, but that this infinity cannot become its object". (E/O I, 75) What A states in conceptual terms-- that desire cannot be desire if there is no separation between desire and its object-- or, in the terms of the metaphor, that the problem is not that desire is not unconditionally satisfied but that unconditional satisfaction has not been made the object of desire-- can be read as a description of the situation of an infant who does not yet have a sense of the distinction between himself and his mother. But less important than this similarity between A's and Freud's description of the first stage of desire is the difference between the point each draws from the description. For Freud, the situation is one of unalloyed bliss. A, on the other hand, views it as much more ambivalent, precisely because the satisfaction it provides comes at the expense of desire's not becoming definite and determinate and, by extension, at the expense of a human being's not becoming definite and determinate:

This is the painful but also, in its sweetness, the delightful and fascinating contradiction which, in its sadness and its melancholy, resounds throughout this stage. Its pain lies not in there being too little, but rather in there being too much.... The object of desire does not fade away, nor does it elude desire's embrace, for then indeed desire would awaken; but it is, without being desired, present to desire, which is just because of this becomes melancholy because it cannot come to the point of desiring. (E/O I, 74-75)

In other words, already with their different conceptualizations of the first stage of desire, we come upon a major difference between Kierkegaard and Freud-- a difference which is a reflection of a basic difference in their views of what it is to be an individual self. For Kierkegaard, ambivalence is present in a human being from the beginning. The total satisfaction which prevents the emergence of determinate desire is, by reason of this prevention, not unconditionally satisfying-- it is unconditional at the expense of being satisfying. For Freud, in contrast, ambivalence is not present at all at this stage. Ambivalence is not a function of desire itself but of the prohibition of desire by an external authority. Ambivalence, in other words, is the consequence of a separation between desire and object. It is not, as it is for Kierkegaard, antecedent to the separation between desire and object.

In the second stage, as represented by Papageno in The Magic Flute, the separation between desire and its object has been effected. But desire still is not determinate as desire. As A says. "...it is not yet qualified as

desire".(E/O I, 79) In other words, while the separation between desire and object is a necessary condition for desire's becoming determinate, it is not a sufficient condition. Rather, the separation produces a situation in which desire must attempt to discover what it desires and thus to become determinate as desire by seeking out various possible objects of desire and determining whether they are, in fact, desirable: "...it only seeks that which it can desire, but it does not desire it".(E/O I, 79)

This second stage is a mixed blessing. On the positive side, it puts an end to the suffocation of the first stage, in which desire cannot become determinate as desire because it is satisfied by an object which is not an object by separating desire and object and thus opening up a whole world of potential determinate objects of satisfaction. On the negative side, the objects which desire seeks out in its attempt to discover what it desires are just as likely to be sources of pain as of pleasure. Because desire is not determinate as desire, it has no control over the results of its attempts at satisfaction.

Once again, A's description of a conceptual stage of desire does seem to correspond to a stage in the lives of children. However, there are no significant comparisons to be made with Freud at this stage. The significance of this stage for A is that, with his description of it, he has set the stage for his description of the aesthetic sphere of existence and of Don Juan as the exemplar of that sphere.

For the significance of Don Juan is that he represents a synthesis of the two stages of desire which we have just described:

The contradiction in the first stage lay in the fact that desire could acquire no object, but without having desired was in possession of its object, and therefore could not reach the point of desiring. In the second stage, the object appears in its manifold, but as desire seeks its object in this manifold, it still has, in a deeper sense, no object, it is not yet posited as desire. In Don Juan on the other hand, desire is absolutely determined as desire; it is, in an intensive and extensive sense, the immediate synthesis of the two preceding stages. The first stage desired the one ideally, the second stage desired the particular under the qualification of the manifold; the third stage is a synthesis of these two. Desire has its absolute object in the particular, it desires the particular absolutely. (E/O I, 83)

To say that "the first stage desired the one ideally"-- or absolutely-- means that the first stage has the absolute, has unconditional "satisfaction", but without having determinate desires and without having determinate objects of desire. The second stage, in contrast, has determinate objects but these determinate objects are not, strictly speaking, objects of desire, since desire is simply at the mercy of whatever objects it happens to stumble upon in its seeking for objects of satisfaction. Thus, the first stage has the absolute but lacks the satisfaction which can be provided only by determinate objects of desire; the second stage has the satisfaction provided by determinate objects of desire but its satisfaction is relative, not absolute, since the objects

which it actually encounters are as likely to be unsatisfying as satisfying.

The third stage, in contrast, desires the particular-- desires determinate objects-- absolutely. Don Juan has determinate desires and determinate objects of desire and he has absolute satisfaction. The determinate objects which he desires absolutely satisfy his determinate desires. Thus, this stage is a synthesis of the preceding two stages. As in the second stage, the object is separated from the desire. But, in contrast to the second stage, desire is determinate and desires a determinate object rather than having to seek it. And, as in the first stage, desire possess its object. But, in contrast to the first stage, desire is determinate and possess the object it desires, rather than possessing before it desires. This is the significance of Don Juan's not being a seducer; unlike a seducer, he obtains what he wants through the sheer force of desiring it. And this is the aesthetic ideal-- to have determinate desires and determinate objects of desire and to pursue one's desires with such passion that the very desire for an object is sufficient to procure it.

Now, the possibility of the realization of this ideal, as A recognizes, depends upon the fulfillment of several conditions. In the first place, being Don Juan and being a determinate individual are mutually exclusive: "...we are not here talking about desire in a particular individual,

but about desire as principle, spiritually determined as that which the spirit excludes". (E/O I, 83-84) In the second place, being Don Juan and having reflection are mutually exclusive. Hence Don Juan cannot be described in language but can only be expressed in music: "the expression for Don Juan is...exclusively musical". (E/O I, 84)

If the realization of this ideal turns out to be impossible, then, it will be because these two conditions cannot be met. And indeed, they cannot be met. Precisely because people in the present age already have determinate desires and already have reflection, they can only resist the present age by becoming determinate individuals and not by becoming like Don Juan. We can understand this if we stop to consider the relationship between desire and reflection in the present age.

It seems obvious that people in the present age have determinate desires for determinate objects. They prefer vanilla to chocolate ice cream, a Chevy to a Ford, etc. They are not in the seeking stage. Rather, they have accumulated enough pleasurable and painful experiences through seeking to have obtained a fair number of distinctions between what they like and what they do not like.

In addition, people in the present age presumably not only have experienced the pain of getting something they do not like; they also have experienced the pain of not

getting something they do like. Reflection enters the picture precisely at this point. To commit oneself passionately to the satisfaction of one's determinate desires is to risk disappointment. Therefore, people in the present age use reflection to calculate the probabilities of getting what they want. But because these probabilities are only probabilities-- because they are never certain-- people in the present age become so involved in their calculations that they never really throw themselves passionately into their enjoyment. Even at the moment when they get what they want, they are worrying about how to keep it or they are beginning to calculate the probabilities of obtaining a new object of satisfaction.

The aesthete's response to this situation is, as we have intimated, to abandon reflection all together and to commit himself passionately to the immediate satisfaction of desire. This, again, is the significance of Don Juan: "He desires, and is constantly desiring, and constantly enjoys the satisfaction of desire...he lacks time in advance in which to lay his plans, and time afterward in which to become conscious of his act".(E/O I, 97)

Unlike Don Juan, however, the aesthete already has determinate desires and already has reflection. A indicates his awareness of this difference between Don Juan and himself when he contrasts sensuous love and psychical love:

...psychical love...is...different in its relation to every single individual who is the

object of love. Therein lies its wealth, its rich content. But such is not the case with Don Juan. (E/O I, 93)

Therefore,

Psychical love...has the doubt and unrest in it, as to whether it will...see its desire fulfilled... This anxiety sensuous love does not have. (E/O I, 93)

Once a person has particular determinate desires, in other words, particular determinate objects or people make a difference to him. Thus, he cannot help but reflect upon the possibility of gaining or losing the particular desired object or person. Don Juan's desire, however, is not determinate in this sense. No particular object or person makes any particular difference to him. Instead, he is satisfied by whatever particular object or person happens to be at hand. Thus, he has no occasion to reflect upon the possibility of gaining or losing a particular object of desire.

But, with this description of what it would mean to be a Don Juan, we can begin to see why A does not attempt to become a Don Juan himself but, rather, attempts to experience Don Juan vicariously through music. A cannot become a Don Juan because he cannot help but make distinctions between more or less desirable objects of satisfaction and he cannot help but employ reflection in order to obtain the more desirable objects and avoid the less desirable objects. Music, however, unlike language or any other reflective medium, does not make distinctions.

And yet, in absolute contrast to present age reflection, music, precisely by not making distinctions, gives A absolutely immediate experience. Thus,

Music...is far more abstract than language, and therefore does not express the individual but the general in all its generality, and yet it expresses the general not in reflective abstraction, but in the immediate concrete. (E/O I, 94)

Now, it may be helpful to point out here that the attempt to transcend present age reflection through the immediate experience of music is not peculiar to nineteenth century romantic admirers of Mozart. We have witnessed similar attempts in our own time-- most recently, perhaps, as a general cultural phenomenon, in the sixties. Thus, for example, in 1968, Paul Williams, generally considered to be the founder of rock and roll criticism, defended rock music over against folk music precisely by claiming that rock, unlike folk, allows the listener to transcend reflection:

'Folk' basically demands a relationship between all words and ideas in a song, unless nonsense words are used, whereas rock may be as totally noncognitive without being nonsense as 'Hey ninety-eight point six the love that was the medicine that saved me, oh I love my baby'.... And the direct appeal to the mind made by 'folk' (straightforward words, guitar, voice) cannot compare, it seems to me, with the abilities of rock to move people's muscles, bodies, caught up and swaying and moving so that a phrase... can actually become your whole body, can sink into your soul on a more than cognitive level. (Williams, 99)

But with this comparison of A's attempt to transcend the reflection of the present age through music with a more recent attempt to do the same, we can begin to understand why attempts of this type are ultimately unsuccessful. In the essay from which we have just quoted, "Rock Is Rock: A Discussion of a Doors Song" (Williams, 93-99), Williams describes Jim Morrison, the lead singer of the Doors, in much the same terms in which A describes Don Juan-- as a person whose absolute commitment to the satisfaction of sexual desire absolutely annihilates distinctions between particular, more or less desirable people. Williams, like A, however, chooses not to make this commitment himself but, rather, to experience Morrison's commitment vicariously through his music. And, in retrospect, it seems that Williams made the wiser decision. Jim Morrison died, apparently of a drug overdose, several years after Williams' essay was written. An absolute commitment to self-transcendence can only be realized through a quite literal self-annihilation.

Unlike Don Juan and Jim Morrison, in other words, A and Paul Williams cannot consistently realize their aspirations. This is because, unlike Don Juan and Jim Morrison, they do not really want to transcend themselves. Rather, they want to transcend themselves self-consciously, to lose themselves in such a way as to be conscious of their loss of self. But this is precisely what they cannot do. A, in fact, recognizes the impossibility of this

position when he refers to Mozart as the person "...to whom I offer thanks that I did not die without having loved even though my love became unhappy". (E/O I, 47)

A recognizes, in other words, that his attempt to lose self-consciousness self-consciously is doomed to failure. To attempt to experience Don Juan vicariously through music is to be a determinate, reflective individual-- insofar as I attempt to experience pure sensuous immediacy, I establish my vicariously experiencing self as different from the pure sensuous immediacy which I experience; and since pure sensuous immediacy involves transcendence of the self, in my very vicarious experiencing of it I am conscious of myself as that which is transcended.

But A does not, in this essay, take the step of attempting to overcome the contradictions of his position, to overcome his despair. Instead, he both acknowledges the despair of his position and chooses to remain in it:

My admiration, my sympathy, my piety, the child in me, the woman in me, demanded more than thought could give. My thought had found repose, rested happy in its knowledge; then I came to it and begged it yet once more to set itself in motion, to venture the utmost. It knew very well that it was in vain; but since I am accustomed to living on good terms with my thought, it did not refuse me. However, its efforts accomplished nothing; incited by me it constantly transcended itself and constantly fell back into itself.... In this way the preceding argument involves itself in a self-contradiction and easily dissolves into nothing.... And although I know perfectly well that it will accomplish nothing, I am still as likely to ask it once more to play the same game... (E/O I, 56-57)

The first stage of the aesthetic sphere, then, runs

aground over A's ambivalence-- over his simultaneously wanting and not wanting to be a determinate, reflective individual. But with this conclusion about the inherent contradiction of the first stage of the aesthetic sphere, we are in a position to complete our comparison of Kierkegaard and Freud. A's evocation of Don Juan is not dissimilar to Freud's evocation of early childhood-- both claim to describe a situation in which desire is satisfied without the intervention of reflection. For Freud, of course, reflection eventually intervenes as the ego develops and the child comes to recognize his separation from the objects of his satisfaction. With this separation comes the realization that his desires will never again be satisfied immediately and absolutely by objects in the external world. But we cannot get over our desire to return to the unalloyed satisfactions of childhood and, unable to do so in reality, we do so in imagination. Religion is, of course, for Freud, the chief purveyor of the illusions of substitute satisfaction but it is not the only one. All of them are attempts to recapture in reflection a situation which precedes the development of reflection.

For Kierkegaard, as we have seen, there was not and could not have been a state like the one Freud describes as existing prior to the development of reflection. A's vicarious experience of Don Juan is therefore not an expression of his desire to return to an earlier,

pre-reflective state. A does not simply want to abandon self-consciousness. Rather, as we have seen, he wants to abandon self-consciousness self-consciously. Thus, A's attempt to experience Don Juan vicariously is not a substitute satisfaction for the immediate experience of being a Don Juan. Rather, it is an expression of the fact that A does not want to be a Don Juan, that-- however ambivalently-- he prefers consciousness to unconsciousness. In this assertion that Freudian substitute satisfactions are not substitutes at all but are, rather, expressions of an ambivalent aspiration to self-consciousness lies a major difference between Kierkegaard and Freud.

In Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties, Morris Dickstein makes a comparison similar to Paul Williams' between the folk music of the early sixties and the rock and roll-- or "rock"-- which succeeded it and which is symbolized by Bob Dylan's "going electric" at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965. In summing up the importance of rock music for that period, Dickstein says:

Though changes in the other arts reveal the sixties and expose its sensibility, rock was the culture of the sixties in a unique and special way.... Rock was the organized religion of the sixties. (Dickstein, 185)

The comparison of rock and religion is important here because it allows us to conclude this section of this

chapter with A's own conclusions about the cultural significance of his position-- a significance which he describes in religious terms. Already at the beginning of "The Musical Stages of the Erotic", A opposes pure sensuous immediacy to Christianity. A's remarks must be taken seriously here for, as a representative of the "lower immediacy" and thus as the most extreme opponent of the "higher immediacy" of Christianity, A actually has a better understanding of the significance of Christianity than any pseudonym except the Christian pseudonym Anti-Climacus. A's understanding of the significance of Christianity is certainly better, for example, than that of Judge William, the pseudonymous apologist for the ethical sphere of existence, who consistently defends his position in Christian terms. A's discussion of the opposition between pure sensuous immediacy and Christianity is thus the first trustworthy statement by a pseudonym about the general role which Christianity plays in Kierkegaard's thought. A states the relationship between sensuousness and Christianity as follows:

Since the sensuous generally is that which should be negative, it is clearly evident that it is posited first through the act which excludes it, in that it posits the opposite positive principle. As principle, as power, as a self-contained system, sensuousness is first posited in Christianity; and in that sense it is true that Christianity brought sensuousness into the world....to add still another qualification, which will, perhaps, show more emphatically what I mean: as a determinant of spirit, sensuousness was first posited by Christianity. This is quite natural, for Christianity is spirit, and spirit is the positive principle which Christianity has

brought into the world. (E/O I, 59, 60)

As we saw in the preceding chapter, spirit and the self are synonymous. If Christianity brings spirit into the world, then, Christianity brings the self into the world. Christianity is the source of the "decision in existence"-- the call to each human being to become an individual by having the right relationship between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal. But in positing the self, Christianity negates the sensuous, for the sensuous, as we have seen through our discussion of Don Juan, is precisely the passionate negation of the self. But the self can only be negated if it has been posited. Thus, for the Greek culture which preceded Christianity, sensuousness has a different meaning than it has for Christianity:

Sensuousness, then, already existed in the world but without being spiritually determined. How then has it existed? Psychically. It was in this manner that it existed in paganism, and, in its most perfect expression, in Greece. But sensuousness psychically determined is not opposition, exclusion, but harmony and accord.... The sensuous was thus not posited as a principle; the principle of soul which constituted the beautiful personality was unthinkable without the sensuous; the erotic based upon the sensuous was for this reason not posited as a principle. (E/O I, 60-61)

In the Greek conception of the self, in other words, the self was a hierarchical relationship between soul and body. While the body was subordinate to the soul, it was not in opposition to it. Rather, the two were inseparable such that the idea of a soul without a body was literally

inconceivable. Thus, it was inconceivable for this conception of the self that it could be up to a human being to constitute the right relationship between soul and body. To be a human being simply was to be constituted as a hierarchical relationship between soul and body. The issue for a human being was whether to acknowledge this relation or to deny it but it was not whether to constitute it.

The difference between the Christian and Greek conceptions of the self is, according to A, expressed theologically. The Greek conception is expressed theologically in the idea that the difference between the god Eros and human beings is precisely that the god of love is not himself in love. If Eros is a god, he is absolutely different from human beings. If human beings have the sensuous by nature, Eros must lack it. For Christianity, according to A, the situation is precisely the opposite. The meaning of the Incarnation is that God embodies that which human beings lack:

In the Incarnation, the special individual has the entire fullness of life within himself, and this fullness exists for other individuals only in so far as they behold it in the incarnated individual. The Greek consciousness gives us the converse relation. That which constitutes the power of the god is not in the god, but in all the other individuals, who refer it to him; he is himself, as it were, powerless and impotent, because he communicates his power to the whole world. (E/O I, 62)

For the Greeks, in other words, a human being is a self by definition and the sensuous is part of the

definition of what it is to be a self. For Christianity, a human being must become a self-- it is because I am not a self that God must be incarnated in order to show me how to become one-- and the sensuous is the passionate opposition to this demand. A Don Juan, a sensuous-erotic genius, then, is just the reverse image of Christ-- instead of having "the entire fullness of life within himself", he represents a kind of passionate emptiness, passionate negation, passionate nothingness:

Hence the sensuous as principle is posited by Christianity, as is also the sensuous-erotic, as principle; the representative idea was introduced into the world by Christianity. If I now imagine the sensuous-erotic as a principle, as a power, as a kingdom qualified spiritually, that is to say, so qualified that the spirit excludes it; if I imagine this principle concentrated in a single individual, then I have the concept of sensuous-erotic genius. This is an idea which the Greeks did not have, which Christianity first brought into the world, even if only in an indirect sense. (E/O I, 62-63)

Christianity, in contrast, demands the opposite of sensuous-erotic genius:

If on the contrary the relation relates itself to its own self, the relation is then the positive third term and this is the self.... Such a relation which relates itself to its own self (that is to say, a self) must either have constituted itself or have been constituted by another.... Such a derived, constituted, relation is the human self, a relation which relates itself to its own self, and in relating itself to its own self relates itself to another. (SUD 146)

Christianity, in other words, by making another individual the condition of the possibility for my becoming

a self, sets itself in opposition to the Greek conception that I already have my identity within me. Christian transcendence destroys Greek immanence. But this destruction leaves only two possibilities in its wake-- either I can become the self whose possibility Christianity posits or I can annihilate that self. A has seen that the latter option is, in fact, no option. Thus, if he is to overcome the despair of the present age, he must confront the Christian problem-- if not necessarily the Christian solution-- rather than seek to transcend it. His attempt to do so while remaining true to the aspirations of the aesthetic sphere of existence is the subject of the remaining essays in the first volume of Either/Or.

Before turning to these remaining essays, it may be in order, however, to say one word more about the cultural conclusions to be drawn from A's contrast between Christianity and sensuous immediacy. To understand the significance of this contrast is to gain a new perspective on two of the competing factions in the ongoing struggle over the meaning and significance of contemporary culture. Once again, we can see the struggle being waged in the domain of popular music but its scope obviously extends far beyond the bounds of this domain.

A gives us the terms in which to understand this struggle when he remarks that:

Here the significance of music is revealed in its full validity, and it also reveals itself in a stricter sense as a Christian art, or rather as the art which Christianity posits in excluding from itself, as being a medium for that which Christianity excludes from itself, and thereby posits. In other words, music is daemonic. In the erotic-sensuous genius, music has its absolute object. It is not of course intended to say by this that music cannot also express other things, but this is its proper object. (E/O I, 63)

A would agree, in other words, with conservative Christian critics who contend that rock and roll is the devil's music. But the reason for his agreement is not-- or, at least, is not directly-- that rock and roll is one person of that ersatz trinity whose other persons are sex and drugs. It is not, in other words, that rock and roll is music for the body. It is, rather, that rock and roll, in at least some of its manifestations, is an attempt to transcend the self. In this sense, sex and drugs are also demonic not as forms of sensual indulgence but as forms of what A has called the sensuous-- the passionate attempt to consciously transcend the self.

But if the attempt to transcend the self, and not sensual indulgence per se, makes rock and roll the devil's music, this casts a highly ironic light upon some of the Christian critics of rock and roll. At least some of these critics seem to subscribe to a version of Christianity whose concerns are indistinguishable from the concerns of the present age. Their version of Christianity, in other

words, is an attempt to cover up the issue of the self. But if this is the case, they are in an even worse position, in Christian terms, than are the artists they criticize. As Kierkegaard states in The Present Age, the lighthearted leap into the aesthetic sphere has at least this one advantage-- if an individual leaps passionately, she will discover the contradictions of the aesthetic sphere and of all of the lower spheres. Her leap into the aesthetic sphere will be the noose that drags her into eternity. If, on the other hand, a person refuses to recognize that there is an issue about the self, she will never even leap into the aesthetic sphere, let alone into the arms of God. Thus, much Christian criticism of contemporary culture is, from the perspective of Kierkegaard's Christianity, actually a resistance to the call in existence and to the claims of Christian faith. What looks, on the surface, like a criticism of sensual indulgence per se is also a form of resistance to the issue of becoming a self.

But conservative critics are not the only ones who have equated popular culture-- and, especially, popular music-- with sensuality and who have attributed the failures of, for example, the youth culture of the sixties to the problems inherent in the unrestrained pursuit of sensual satisfaction. Members of that culture, as well, have attributed its failures to these problems. However, they have tended to see these problems more in economic or

political terms than in the moral and religious terms of their conservative compatriots. Thus, for example, Morris Dickstein in Gates of Eden, in describing the reasons for the break-up of the Beatles, says:

They were bound up with the decade in more ways than one, for the sixties were a period that believed in magic and innocence, that had a touching faith in the omnipotence of individual desire. If one strand of the sixties was Edenic and utopian, the Beatles were its most playful incarnation. Irving Howe labeled this 'a psychology of unobstructed need' and insisted that it threatened the values of the culture. But in the end the believers threatened only themselves; the Beatles sang that 'nothing is real', but night-sticks and bad trips were a dose of reality designed to counteract excessive faith in the perfectibility of man and his institutions. Nixon was another serious downer, and when hard times came to pinch and squeeze the economy-- and to contract our psychic space as well-- we could see how much of the rainbow colors of the culture of the sixties were painted on the fragile bubble of a despised affluence, an economic boom that was simply taken for granted. (Dickstein, 210)

Though Dickstein himself does not draw it, one conclusion which could be drawn from his analysis-- and which seems to have been drawn, after similar analyses, by many members of the generation of the sixties-- is that a life of unrestrained desire, while ultimately preferable, is unrealizable. The unrestrained pursuit of the satisfaction of desire, in other words, would be the highest mode of self-realization if we lived in a utopian society in which all of our desires could be satisfied. But we do not. Therefore, we must perform a kind of perpetual balancing act. On the one hand, we must

acknowledge the demands of society; on the other, we should keep our utopian dreams alive-- if only as dreams. We go to our offices by day and get stoned and listen to our old records by night. The title of Dickstein's last chapter could be a fitting motto for this attitude-- "Remembering the Sixties, Surviving the Seventies".

From a Kierkegaardian perspective, however, the question can always arise as to why people come to accept a particular view of what it is to be a self. In this case, we can ask why people accept the idea that to be a self is to engage in private gratification constrained by public necessity-- in short, to accept the present age. We could say, of course, that they are simply members of their generation and that, raised with notions of the omnipotence of individual desire, they have been put in the position of trying to preserve what they can of their desire in the face of recalcitrant institutions. Leaving aside the question of whether individuals are simply products of the sensibilities of their generation, this explanation might make some sense if the chief cultural representatives of the sensibility of the sixties really did straightforwardly promote a vision of the unrestrained pursuit of desire. But if, as we will try to show later on in this chapter through the analysis of some works of Paul McCartney and Bob Dylan, many of the chief cultural representatives of the sensibility of the sixties did not promote such a vision, why were they taken to be doing so? Part of the

answer, of course, is that, in the case of the Beatles, for instance, the music of the songs often provided the possibility of a kind of immediate release which the lyrics of the songs denied. Furthermore, attention to the Beatles as phenomenon often completely overshadowed attention to the Beatles as artists. Again, however, we can ask why this was the case.

When we begin to ask these questions, we begin to arrive at the conclusion that, for many people, devotion to popular music and culture is a way of avoiding the issue of the self just as surely as is condemnation of popular music and culture for others. This in itself is hardly news, of course-- popular culture has been dismissed as a present age fad from the beginning. What is news is that, from a Kierkegaardian perspective, the desire to avoid confronting the issue of the self can be so strong that it distorts the artifacts of popular culture in its interest. Thus, even so ordinarily perceptive a critic as Dickstein, under the impress of the Beatles as cultural phenomenon, sees the Beatles as straightforward proponents of the omnipotence of desire. But, in the case of the participants in the culture of the sixties, the distortions are even more striking. Thus, to take only one example, the Beatles' Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band was enthusiastically greeted by rock critics as an endorsement of the aspirations of the counter-culture in the late sixties and then was just as enthusiastically denounced by

rock critics as an endorsement of the same aspirations in the early seventies. In neither case, however, did the majority of rock critics stop to ask themselves whether Sergeant Pepper really was the kind of straightforward endorsement of the counter-culture which they took it to be. In neither case did they recognize the very deep despair about the counter-culture and its failure to provide meaningful personal identities which the album expressed. Rather, in denouncing the Beatles in the seventies, the critics avoided having to face up to the issues the Beatles were raising about self and culture just as surely as they avoided having to face up to them in the sixties by uncritically endorsing the aspirations of the counter-culture. In the one case, they took up a present age fad involving no real commitment and no real risk to themselves and in the other they just as quickly abandoned it.

To conclude, then: A's contrast between sensuousness and Christianity-- between the conscious attempt to transcend the self and the conscious attempt to become a self-- allows us to see how both what supposed Christians see as defenses of sensuousness in this culture and what supposed defenders of sensuousness see as defenses of Christianity are, in fact, defenses of the present age. Despite all their surface differences, they really are mirror images of each other. The question, then, is how someone like A who has truly committed himself to the

sensuous only to discover its contradictions but who is unwilling to become a Christian in Kierkegaard's sense is to become a self with passion. This is the question which occupies the remainder of the first volume of Either/Or as well, as we shall see, of the popular artists who survived the sixties.

2

"The Rotation Method" and the "Diapsalmata"

Having recognized the contradiction in his attempt self-consciously to negate self-consciousness, A recognizes that he has determinate desires for determinate objects; that his desires can be frustrated by his inability to attain or retain the objects of his desires; and that reflection increases the probability of his attaining or retaining the objects of his desires. The question which now confronts A is the following: Can he acknowledge this situation and still retain his passion? Can he retain his absolute commitment to immediacy or must he resign himself to the relative satisfactions and relative calculations of the present age?

A's answer to this question is found in his essay "The Rotation Method". In the essay, A proposes to demonstrate the compatibility of his absolute commitment to enjoyment with his recognition of the inescapability of desire and of reflection. A's proposal is, quite simply, to enjoy immediate objects of desire absolutely by enjoying them in reflection. How A proposes to do this and the contradictions of his proposal are the subjects of this section.

Before turning to A's proposal itself, however, it is important to note, in passing, that A's acknowledgement that his task is to become a self rather than to negate himself results in the first of several sustained reinterpretations of the present age. It is as if, now that he has recognized that he cannot transcend desire and reflection and that he therefore has something in common with people in the present age, A feels the need to distinguish himself from the present age all the more sharply. In "The Musical Erotic", A scarcely mentioned the present age. In relation to the luminous prospect of pure sensuous immediacy, it simply seemed to pale into insignificance. But now that A recognizes that he cannot transcend reflection, he understands the problem of the present age in much more reflective terms. Now the problem is not that the immediate satisfactions which present age reflection permits are only relative satisfactions. Rather, the problem is that present age reflection does not even permit relative satisfactions. The categories in terms of which A understands and lives his life are no longer aesthetic sensuousness versus present age reflection but are, rather the interesting versus the boring. As A himself puts it, "Boredom is the root of all evil". (E/O I 281)

In other words, A retroactively reinterprets the problem of the present age in the light of the failure of one attempt to solve it and in light of the prospects for

success of a new attempt to solve it. As we shall see, this pattern of retroactive reinterpretation will repeat itself continually in the transitions between stages of a single sphere of existence and in the transitions between spheres. If the old attempt to solve the problem failed, the new attempt will claim, it failed because it misconceived the problem. In claiming to conceive the problem correctly, the new attempt will claim to solve it.

A finds the evidence for his analysis of the boredom of the present age in the same place where The Present Age found the evidence for its analysis of the present age as denying the call in existence-- in the restless activity of people in the present age. Like Kierkegaard, A recognizes that the restless activity of the present age represents a denial of the proper relationship between infinite and finite. People in the present age have no concrete commitments. Their commitments are indefinite and their commitments are conditional:

One tires of living in the country, and moves to the city; one tires of one's native land, and travels abroad; one is europamude, and goes to America, and so on; finally one indulges in a sentimental hope of endless journeyings from star to star.... One tires of porcelain dishes and eats on silver; one tires of silver and turns to gold; one burns half of Rome to get an idea of the burning of Troy. (E/O I, 287-288)

In contrast to this restless activity, A proposes what he calls "the rotation method": "My method does not consist in change of field, but resembles the true rotation method in changing the crop and the mode of cultivation". (E/O I,

288) In other words, rather than moving from place to place in order to have different experiences or moving from experience to experience while remaining in the same place, A proposes to remain in the same place and to have the same experiences but to experience the same experiences as different experiences by experiencing them differently.

A insists that the success of his proposal depends upon establishing the proper relationship between two relationships to his experience-- relationships which A calls "remembering" and "forgetting". A sums up the proper relationship between remembering and forgetting in his statement that:

No moment must be permitted so great a significance that it cannot be forgotten when convenient; each moment ought, however, to have so much significance that it can be recollected at will. (E/O I, 289)

A provides his own exegesis of this statement in separate discussions of remembering and forgetting. A describes remembering by saying:

To remember in this manner, one must be careful how one lives, how one enjoys.... when you begin to notice that a certain pleasure or experience is acquiring too strong a hold upon the mind, you stop a moment for the purpose of remembering. No other method can better create a distaste for continuing the experience too long. (E/O I, 289)

To remember, in other words, is to establish a reflective distance between myself and my immediate experience. If I do not make the mistake of experiencing all of the pleasure which an experience has to offer in the

moment of my immediate experience of it, the experience remains eternally available to me to reflect upon and to re-live endlessly in my imagination. By the same token, if I keep my distance from my painful experiences in the moment of experiencing them, I can transform my painful experiences into pleasurable experiences in the eternity of remembering:

The more poetically one remembers, the more easily one forgets; for remembering poetically is really only another expression for forgetting. In a poetic memory the experience has undergone a transformation, by which it has lost all its painful aspects. (E/O I, 289)

A's description of forgetting parallels his description of remembering:

A pleasant experience has as past something unpleasant about it, by which it stirs a sense of privation; this unpleasantness is taken away by an act of forgetfulness. The unpleasant has a sting, as all admit. This, too, can be removed by the art of forgetting.... The art in dealing with such experiences consists in talking them over, thereby depriving them of their bitterness; not forgetting them absolutely, but forgetting them for the sake of remembering them. (E/O I, 290-291)

To forget is, again, to establish a reflective distance between myself and my immediate experience. If I can forget that a past pleasurable experience is past and that its pleasure is therefore no longer available to me, I can remember it as pleasurable. Similarly, if I can forget the painful aspects of a past experience while remembering its pleasant aspects, I can experience the pleasant aspects whenever I choose to do so. Thus, A summarizes his method:

"Forgetting and remembering are thus identical arts, and the artistic achievement of this identity is the Archimedean point from which one lifts the whole world".
(E/O I, 291)

A provides several illustrations of his employment of the rotation method as the Archimedean point from which he can lift the whole world. The rotation method completely informs A's relationships to friendship, to marriage and to what he terms "offical position". Indeed, so revealing are A's specific illustrations that Judge William, the author of the ethical rejoinder to the aesthetic sphere of existence which compromises most of the second volume of Either/Or, employs them at length in order to demonstrate the superiority of the ethical sphere to the aesthetic sphere. A's general attitude toward these social relationships is expressed best in his conviction that "The art of remembering and forgetting will also insure against sticking fast in some relationship of life, and make possible the realization of a complete freedom". (E/O I, 291) This general attitude receives its most revealing particular expression in A's discussion of friendship.

For A, the rotation method as it applies to friendship involves, first of all, relating to other people in such a manner as to be able to establish my reflective distance from them at will: "...because you abstain from friendship

it does not follow that you abstain from social contacts. On the contrary, these social relationships may at times be permitted to take on a deeper character, provided you always have so much more momentum in yourself that you can sheer off at will". (E/O I, 291-291) Every commitment to another person, in other words, is a conditional commitment. As soon as I begin to become so attached to the other person that my identity becomes bound up with him and I am vulnerable to losing him or as soon as my freedom is obstructed because my own plans come into conflict with his, it is time to end the relationship.

But the fact that my commitments to other people are conditional commitments does not mean, according to A, that the rotation method cannot be the source of absolute, unconditional satisfaction. Having established my reflective distance from these relationships, I can employ my reflection to give them an absolute character in imagination which they could never have in reality:

It is believed that such conduct leaves unpleasant memories, the unpleasantness being due to the fact that a relationship which has meant something now vanishes and becomes as nothing. But this is a misunderstanding.... it is possible for the same relationship again to play a significant role, though in another manner.... Everything will doubtless return, though in a different form; that which has once been present in the rotation will remain in it, but the mode of cultivation will be varied. You therefore quite consistently hope to meet your friends and acquaintances in a better world, but you do not share the fear of the crowd that they will be altered so that you cannot recognize them; your fear is rather lest they be wholly unaltered. It is remarkable how much significance even the most insignificant person can gain from a rational

mode of cultivation. (E/O I, 292)

In short, A claims to have discovered, in the rotation method, a way of having absolute enjoyment by satisfying his immediate desires in reflection. Because his satisfaction is a satisfaction in reflection and thus is not dependent upon his immediate experience being pleasurable, he cannot fail to attain or retain the objects of his satisfaction. Thus, his satisfaction is absolute. And because his reflection is not present age reflection which calculates the relative probabilities of attaining these objects but is, rather, the object of satisfaction itself, since A enjoys not his immediate experiences but his reflection upon his immediate experiences, reflection is not, as it is for the present age, an obstacle to the absolute but is itself absolute.

If A could maintain himself in this position, in other words, he would have solved the problem of the present age. When we examine his position more closely, however, we find that it contains contradictions which call into question A's self-satisfied tone. Indeed, in the "Diapsalmata", the self-satisfied tone has disappeared and the contradictions which "The Rotation Method" has so artfully concealed rise to the surface.

Before turning to an examination of these contradictions, however, it may be helpful once again to

give an example of the rotation method in contemporary culture. Again, the point here is not to find the most self-conscious, articulate account of this position-- Proust, perhaps, springs most readily to mind here-- but, rather, to find a contemporary character like A himself. Though they are not nearly so self-conscious-- i.e., they do not self-consciously defend the rotation method as a method but simply seem to engage in it-- the songs of Paul McCartney during his tenure as a Beatle provide a neat illustration of the rotation method in practice. It is one of the ironies of the acceptance of popular culture, of course, that the Beatles' music was not generally understood in this way and still is not understood in this way by most interpreters. Here I will discuss lyrics. The music may get its exuberance precisely because it is not straightforwardly exuberant but attempts to overcome the situation which the lyrics describe.

Quite simply, the McCartney songs under consideration represent a flight from commitment. They are not phrased that way in most cases, of course. Instead, they express anger and puzzlement at a girl's leaving him. But when we examine the lyrics and their structure we find a personality emerging whom these women would have reason to abandon-- if they, in fact, (as there seems no reason to believe), abandoned him and were not simply responding to his abandonment of them.

McCartney's version of the rotation method is neatly

illustrated by the sequence of his songs on the Beatles' 1965 album, Help!. (Beatles) On the first side, "The Night Before" is followed by "Another Girl". On the second side, "I've Just Seen A Face" is followed by "Yesterday". In "The Night Before", Paul complains that the woman he was with the night before has changed her mind about him, that love is no longer in her eyes and he entreats her to "treat me like you did the night before". He questions whether she was being truthful and whether he was being taken in, concludes that "when I held you near, you were so sincere" and finally can claim to come up with no reason why the girl left him.

But the next song by Paul, "Another Girl", gives the listener clues to the reason if it does not give them to Paul himself. On this song, it is Paul who is doing the leaving. The reason, he says, is not that he is unhappy-- "I don't want to say that I've been unhappy with you". Rather, it is that the woman he is with is asking for a commitment-- "You're making me say that I've got nobody but you". Meanwhile, Paul has "got another girl". Or, rather, as he qualifies himself later, it's not that "I've got somebody's that's new", it's that "I've seen somebody that's new". And yet, though he has only seen this woman, he already has constructed a fantasy around her-- "She's sweeter than all the girls and I've met quite a few/Nobody in all the world can do what she can do". The most important aspect of this fantasy is that this relationship

will be eternal-- "Another girl, who will love me till the end/Through thick and thin she will always be my friend".

But if we take Paul at his word that "nobody in all the world can do what she can do", we can see why his relationship with the woman in "The Night Before" ended. No woman is going to be able to match up to the fantasy Paul has constructed around the woman he has just seen. Indeed, if we assume that Paul's relationship with the woman in "The Night Before" began in precisely this way, we can get a grip on what is really going on in the song. After singing "Last night is the night I will remember you by"-- a fairly clear statement that the primary function of this woman is to provide him with memories-- Paul sings, "When I think of things we did/It makes me want to cry". The anguish in the word "cry" as he sings it expresses all of the ambivalence of the rotation method. On the one hand, there is anguish about being separated from an immediate object of satisfaction. On the other hand, there is an equally strong anguish about being-- or having been-- so connected and thus so vulnerable.

In short, these two songs, taken together, are perfect expressions of the rotation method's attempt to live in the reflective past and future at the expense of the immediate present. Paul's living with the memory of a past relationship, we see, is the logical result of his idealizing of it as a future relationship and his complete inability to deal with it as a present, vulnerable

relationship.

If the two songs on side one show us the relationship after it was over and then before it begins, the two songs on side two-- "I've Just Seen A Face" and "Yesterday"-- reverse the order and thus confirm our general point. As can be surmised from its title, "I've Just Seen a Face" is a reprise of "Another Girl". "I've just seen a face", Paul sings, and then immediately admits the accidental nature of the encounter-- "had it been another day, I might have looked the other way". Having looked, though, he has made a place for her in his fantasies-- "as it is I'll dream of her tonight" for "other girls were never quite like this".

But this relationship ends like the previous one-- if they are, indeed, two different relationships. "Yesterday", with its capping line, "I believe in yesterday" makes this clear. Again a relationship has ended and again Paul claims not to know why-- "Why she had to go, I don't know/She wouldn't say". But we can see the reason. "Yesterday"-- when he had just seen her-- "love was such an easy game to play" precisely because there was no real relationship. But as soon as there was, Paul couldn't handle it. Now he both wants a relationship which would lift him out of his melancholy and wants the safety of his melancholy at the expense of a real relationship-- hence the ambivalence of the line, "I believe in yesterday"-- i.e., he believes both in the real relationship with a real woman which he claims to have had

and in the kind of living in past and future which precludes this kind of relationship.

As the songs we have just discussed illustrate, a deep melancholy lies just below the surface of the position A advances in "The Rotation Method". As we noted above, this melancholy does not rise to the surface in "The Rotation Method" itself but does so, instead, in the "Diapsalmata". As the line from Paul Pelisson which A uses to introduce the "Diapsalmata" reads:

High rank, knowledge, renown,/ Friendship,
pleasure, and
possessions/ - Everything is nought but wind,
vapor:/ To say it
better, everything is nothing. (E/O I, 18)

Despair, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, means defining the factors of the synthesis in such a way that they negate rather than reinforce each other. Thus, if we want to understand A's despair, we must understand the contradiction in his definition of the factors.

As we have seen, A's project in "The Rotation Method" is to have absolute enjoyment by enjoying his immediate experiences in reflection. As A describes what it means to enjoy his immediate experiences in reflection, he claims that reflection, and not his immediate experience itself, is the source of the meaning of his immediate experience: "one does not enjoy the immediate but something quite different which he arbitrarily imports into it"; (E/O I, 295) "You transform something accidental into the absolute"; "...even the most insignificant thing may

accidentally offer rich material for amusement" (E/O I, 296)

No immediate experience, in other words, has unconditional significance for A. An immediate experience only has unconditional significance insofar as A gives it unconditional significance in reflection. But this immediately raises a question. If the infinite significance of A's finite experiences is purely a product of A's powers of imagination, why does A need to have any finite experiences at all? Why can't A simply produce absolutely enjoyable fantasies in his imagination? On the other hand, if A really does require immediate experiences as a kind of raw material from which to construct his fantasies, how can it be the case that these immediate experiences have no significance of their own? If A's imaginative reflection really requires immediate experiences, it must be the case that the meaning of A's immediate experiences is not solely the product of A's imagination but inheres in his immediate experiences themselves.

To state the matter in slightly different terms, A is caught up in the following contradiction between the infinite and finite factors: Either A's finite experiences are differentiated as significant or insignificant independently of his reflection upon them, in which case the meaning of his experiences is not completely up to him or A makes his finite experiences significant or

insignificant by his reflection upon them, in which case his finite experiences cannot be significantly differentiated. A recognizes the latter half of this contradiction quite clearly in a passage in the "Diapsalmata" where he states:

My view of life is utterly meaningless. I suppose an evil spirit has set a pair of spectacles upon my nose, of which one lens is a tremendously powerful magnifying glass, the other an equally powerful reducing glass. (E/O I, 24)

In other words, if it is completely up to A to determine which of his experiences to enjoy and which not to enjoy, A has no means of discriminating between enjoyable and unenjoyable experiences. The very same experience can be of absolute significance or no significance, depending upon A's arbitrary decision. But this is only to admit that there are no significant differences between A's different experiences:

My life is absolutely meaningless. When I consider the different periods into which it falls, it seems like the word Schnur in the dictionary, which means in the first place a string, in the second, a daughter-in-law. The only thing lacking is that the word Schnur should mean in the third place a camel, in the fourth, a dustbrush. (E/O I, 35)

And if there are no significant differences between A's different experiences, A cannot have passion. Instead of being in a state of absolute enjoyment, A is in a state of absolute indifference:

I do not care for anything. I do not care to ride, for the exercise is too violent. I do not care to walk, walking is too strenuous. I do

not care to lie down, for I should either have to remain lying, and I do not care to do that, or I should have to get up again, and I do not care to do that either. Summa summarum: I do not care at all. (E/O I, 20)

A parallel contradiction plagues A's definitions of possibility and necessity. As we saw in his discussion of friendship, A always is concerned with keeping his possibilities open, with never becoming so identified with a particular kind of experience or a particular person that he cannot leave them at will and suffer no damage to his identity. At the same time, however, A seems to depend upon particular kinds of experiences and particular people for his reflective possibilities. Thus, the question arises, if particular kinds of experiences and relationships play no necessary role in A's imaginative life, can A have an imaginative life at all? And alternatively, if particular kinds of experiences do play a necessary role in A's imaginative life, can A's imaginative life really be the life of pure possibility which he claims it to be?

A uneasily confronts these questions in the "Diapsalmata". There he expresses quite clearly the reasons for his aversion to becoming identified with particular kinds of experiences or particular people. If a particular commitment defines me, to lose that commitment is to lose myself. Therefore, A only involves himself in those projects with which he cannot possibly identify himself so that he will have no identity to lose:

For some time I have been wondering what it was that moved me to resign my position as teacher in a secondary school. As I think it over, it seems to me that such a position was precisely what I wanted. today a light dawned upon me; the reason was just this, that I had considered myself absolutely fitted for the post. Had I retained it, I should have had everything to lose and nothing to gain. Hence I thought it best to resign, and to seek employment with a traveling theatrical troupe of players, since I had no talent for theatricals, and therefore had everything to gain. (E/O I, 32)

The problem, however, is that this kind of detachment, rather than allowing A the possibility of having many different kinds of experiences and relationships without being tied down to any one of them, eliminates the differences between experiences and relationships. Before A has entered any experience or relationship, he already has decided not to let it make any difference to him. Thus, paradoxically, pure possibility is pure necessity because the meaning of every experience has been determined in advance:

Wretched Destiny! In vain you paint your furrowed face like an old harlot, in vain you jingle your fool's bells; you weary me; it is always the same, an idem per idem. No variety, always a rehash! Come, Sleep and Death, you promise nothing, you keep everything. (E/O I, 29)

And since it is A who has determined the meaning of every experience in advance, the rotation method is really a form of self-enslavement:

What is the power that binds me? How was the chain made with which the Fenris wolf was bound? It was wrought from the sound of a cat's paws walking over the ground, from women's beards, from the roots of rocks, from the nerves

of bears, from the breath of fishes, and the spittle of birds. And thus I, too, am bound in a chain formed of dark imaginings, of unquiet dreams, of restless thoughts, of dread presentiments, of inexplicable anxieties. This chain is 'very supple, soft as silk, elastic under the highest tension, and cannot be broken in two'. (E/O I, 33)

The contradiction in A's definitions of the eternal and the temporal can be traced back, of course, to the contradiction in his definitions of remembering and forgetting. Once again, the contradiction which A repressed in "The Rotation Method" rises to the surface in the "Diapsalmata". A's future is the remembering of his past experiences. But since it is completely up to A which of his past experiences to remember, his future has no fixed content. At every moment, he can decide to remember a different past experience in the future. Thus, A has no continuity in his life because in every present moment it is up to him to decide which of his past experiences to remember in the future. Indeed, if A were totally consistent, he would decide in every present moment whether to renew his past decision to remember his past experiences in the future. As A says:

What portends? What will the future bring?
I do not know, I have no presentiment. When a spider hurls itself down from some fixed point, consistently with its nature, it always sees before it only an empty space wherein it can find no foothold however much it sprawls. And so it is with me: always before me an empty space; what drives me forward is a consistency which lies behind me. This life is topsy-turvy and terrible, not to be endured. (E/O I, 24)

But A's lack of continuity is only half the story. In

another sense, A has total continuity in his life. The past experiences which A remembers have no more content as past experiences than they do as future experiences. Because the meaning of a past experience derives from A's remembering of the experience and not from the experience itself, A exists in a kind of eternity which bears no relation to the temporal at all:

There is nothing more dangerous to me than remembering. The moment I have remembered some life-relationship, that moment it has ceased to exist. People say that separation tends to revive love. Quite true, but it revives it in a purely poetic manner. The life that is lived wholly in memory is the most perfect conceivable, the satisfactions of memory are richer than any reality, and have a security that no reality possesses. A remembered life-relation has already passed into eternity, and has no more temporal interest. (E/O I, 31-32)

In short, the distinction between the eternal and temporal does not exist for A:

I immerse everything I have experienced in a baptism of forgetfulness unto an eternal remembrance. Everything temporal and contingent is forgotten and erased. Then I sit like an old man, grey-haired and thoughtful, and explain picture after picture in a voice as soft as a whisper; and at my side a child sits and listens, although he remembers everything before I tell it. (E/O I, 41)

And this, again, means that A has no passion in his life:

If any man needs to keep a diary, I do, and that for the purpose of assisting my memory. After a time it frequently happens that I have completely forgotten the reason which led me to do this or that, not only in connection with trifles, but also in connection with the most momentous decisions. And if I do recall my

reason, it sometimes seems so strange to me that I can hardly believe it was my reason. This doubt could be resolved if I had something to refer to. A reason is generally a very curious thing; if I apprehend it with the total intensity of my passion, then it grows up into a huge necessity which can move heaven and earth. But if I lack passion, I look down upon it with scorn. (E/O I, 32)

But with this conclusion, we realize that "The Rotation Method" has completely failed to solve the problem which it was intended to solve-- the problem of the present age. What it really has accomplished is to bring A to a more acute realization of the problem by showing him that his attempt to solve it cannot succeed. Thus, near the end of the "Diapsalmata", in the section entitled, "Either/Or: An ecstatic lecture", A acknowledges that, rather than allowing him to escape levelling, "The Rotation Method" has produced levelling:

If you marry, you will regret it; if you do not marry, you will also regret it; if you marry or do not marry, you will regret both; whether you marry or do not marry, you will regret both. Laugh at the world's follies, you will regret it; weep over them, you will also regret that; laugh at the world's follies or weep over them, you will regret both, whether you laugh at the world's follies or weep over them, you will regret both.... Hang yourself, and you will also regret that; hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both; whether you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both. (E/O I, 37)

Now, as the opening pages of "The Equilibrium Between the Aesthetical and the Ethical in the Composition of Personality" make clear, A could leap from the despair of the "Diapsalmata" into the ethical sphere of existence. As

both Judge William's denunciations of A's version of the meaning of either/or at the beginning of his lecture and his interpretations of marriage, work and friendship at the end of his letter make clear, he is addressing his defense of the ethical sphere precisely to a person who is in the specific despair which A is in at the end of the "Diapsalmata". But while A could leap from the despair of the "Diapsalmata" into the ethical sphere, he does not do so. Instead, he discovers a new refinement in the aesthetic position. "The Musical Stages of the Erotic", as we saw, was A's attempt to transcend the issue of becoming a self-- an attempt which failed because A could not transcend his having determinate desires and having reflection. A's answer to the failure of his attempt at self-transcendence was, as we saw, the attempt to enjoy the immediate objects of his desires in reflection-- an attempt which also is a failure. This would seem to be as far as A's position can take him. No doubt, this is why Judge William chooses to respond to A at this point. But A has another card up his sleeve. If he cannot absolutely enjoy his own immediate desires in reflection, he can enjoy vicariously in reflection the desires of other people. Or, to state the project more accurately, he can enjoy vicariously in reflection the conflict in other people between immediacy and reflection. This attempt is the subject of the remaining essays in the first volume of Either/Or.

3

"Diary of the Seducer"

A's attempt to experience vicariously the conflict between reflection and immediacy is the subject of three essays-- "Diary of the Seducer", "Shadowgraphs" and "The Ancient Tragical Motif as Reflected in the Modern". An important common thread runs through these three essays-- namely, that all of the objects of A's attempt to experience vicariously the conflict between reflection and immediacy are women.

For A-- and, in a different, but parallel, way, for Judge William, the pseudonymous defender of the ethical sphere of existence-- women have a kind of immediacy which men lack. It is unclear whether A and Judge William think that this immediacy is a natural, biological fact or whether they think that it is a sign of the fact that women have not yet been fully assimilated into the reflective present age. It is also unclear what Kierkegaard himself thinks, although his remarks on the levelling of the differences between men and women in The Present Age and his assertion that faith makes no distinction between men and women would seem to incline him towards the latter opinion. Kierkegaard's ironic tone in relation to Judge

William's pronouncements about the liberation of women would also seem to put him in the historical, as opposed to biological, camp.

Whatever Kierkegaard's personal intentions, however, his pseudonyms' use of women characters as vehicles for the expression and repression of their own conflicts between reflection and immediacy casts a penetrating light upon the relationship between sexism and issues of personal identity. Through the pseudonyms' descriptions of their relationships to women, we see that what is at stake in sexism is not only political or economic or sexual power but the very identity of the self. More than any other relationship, the relationship between men and women is the vehicle for the expression of A and Judge William's tremendous ambivalence about the project of becoming a self.

So central to A's project is his reflective relationship to the immediacy of his women characters that we may determine the proper order of his essays by determining the degree of immediacy which belongs to each of the women he discusses. Thus, the "Diary of the Seducer" is the first essay because its woman character, Cordelia, begins in a state of immediacy and only is brought into a state of reflection by the author of the essay himself. "Shadowgraphs" is the second essay because its women characters already have reflection and use their reflection in order to preserve their relationship to an

immediate situation. In "The Ancient Tragical Motif" we have a woman character whose reflection is so well developed that she is on the verge of reflecting herself out of immediacy all together.

We begin, then, with the "Diary of the Seducer". The "plot" of the "diary" is quite simple. The diary is a record of the seduction by a man named Johannes of a girl named Cordelia. The seduction consists in Johannes' gradually insinuating himself into Cordelia's life, presenting himself to her in mysterious ways which awaken her interest in him to the point where she falls in love with him and agrees to become engaged to him and, at this precise point, breaking off the engagement.

This simple plot, however, really is not the point of the "Diary". In a very real sense, the point of the "Diary" is the diary itself. In his diary, Johannes plots every detail of his seduction of Cordelia in advance and records every detail of it afterwards. So voluminous are the details of this particular seduction that the "Diary of the Seducer" is far and away the longest piece in the first volume of Either/Or. Only "The Musical Erotic"-- a statement in language about the insufficiency of language-- even comes close to matching it in length. From the sheer amount of recorded detail, which is all out of proportion to the significance of the events it records, it is safe to conclude that reflection upon seduction and not the immediacy of seduction itself, is the point of Johannes'

endeavors.

This conclusion is reinforced by the way in which the diary is presented. As we have remarked, Johannes-- and not A-- is the purported author of the diary. Not only does A not claim to be the author of the diary; he claims to have recoiled in horror upon first discovering and reading it. Given what we have seen of A's character so far, it is difficult to take his moral outrage seriously and not to view it as a cover-up of his own complicity in Johannes' actions. But A's expressions of outrage not only serve his own private purposes. More importantly, they serve the purposes of the text. They reinforce our awareness that, as readers of Johannes' diary, we are voyeurs, observing something which was not intended to be observed. As such, we are in exactly the same position as Johannes himself. The seduction of the "Diary of the Seducer"-- both the seduction in the text and the seduction of the text-- is a voyeuristic seduction.

The real interest of the diary for us, then, is not in the details of the seduction-- of which, again, there are many-- but in Johannes' relation to these details. For Johannes every blush, every sign of discomfort, every expression of love is of monumental import. For the reader these details are of monumental disinterest. What is of interest is Johannes' particular form of obsession with them.

In one sense, the meaning of the particular obsession

which Johannes displays in the "Diary" only becomes clear in the next two essays we will discuss where, in his role as a member of the society called the Symparanekromenoi and in his examination of fictional women characters who are several steps beyond Cordelia in reflective capacity, A explicitly describes his method instead of merely displaying it. The meaning of A's obsessions is most evident in the essay with which we will conclude our discussion of the aesthetic sphere, "The Unhappiest Man", where A's project of both being himself and losing himself in another reaches its denouncement. But while we can only anticipate the conclusions of these essays here, we can begin to see how A might reach them if we recall to mind the rotation method and its contradictions.

A's aim in "The Rotation Method" was to enjoy his immediate experiences absolutely in reflection. As we saw, this aim was contradictory-- either A's finite experiences were meaningful, in which case their meanings were not objects of A's reflective control, or the meanings of A's finite experiences were objects of A's reflective control, in which case A's finite experiences were meaningless. "Diary of the Seducer" is an attempt to resolve this contradiction. A retains his aim of enjoying immediate experiences absolutely in reflection. Now, however, the immediate experiences which A enjoys are not his own immediate experiences but someone else's. Thus, A does not have the problem that the meaning of his own immediate

experiences is out of his control because his own immediate experiences are no longer an issue for him. Instead, A can enjoy the immediate experiences of someone else insofar as their meanings are out of the control of the other person. And he can do so precisely because the meanings of the other person's immediate experiences are out of her control precisely because A/Johannes is controlling them.

To state the matter in slightly different terms, by recounting to himself the details of Cordelia's seduction, Johannes is able to experience Cordelia's immediate experience of being seduced but to do so in a neutralized, reflective mode. Johannes thus is able to enjoy the benefits of immediate experience without having to expose himself to its risks.

But Johannes' vicarious experience of Cordelia's experience serves another purpose as well. Not only does it allow him to transcend his own reflection in the immediate experience of another. It also does the opposite. Insofar as he experiences Cordelia's experience of being seduced by him, he comes to see himself through Cordelia's eyes. Precisely his immersion in her immediate experience gives him a perspective from which to see himself and thus to establish his own identity. By seeing himself through her eyes, he sees himself as a definite, determinate individual.

Thus, "Diary of the Seducer" accomplishes two purposes. First, it allows Johannes to have immediate

experience while retaining reflective control. Second, it allows him to have a sense of himself by giving him a perspective on himself. If Johannes could remain in this position, he would have resolved the contradictions which were the undoing of "The Rotation Method".

But this position, as Johannes himself realizes, is inherently unstable. His seduction of Cordelia has been successful. If she remains attached to him, he will have to marry her and he will have ensnared himself in precisely the kind of relationship in the avoidance of which he has marshalled all of his reflective resources. If, on the other hand, Johannes breaks the engagement, he will destroy precisely that which attracted him to Cordelia in the first place-- her immediacy. Cordelia's response to the broken engagement will be to reflect upon her relationship with Johannes for the first time, to ask herself whether he really loved her and whether she really loved him.

Not surprisingly, Johannes' response to the instability of his situation is to break the engagement. He does so not resignedly but with an attitude of cold calculation. Indeed, this has been his intention from the beginning. There is something which at least borders on, if it does not actually involve, sadomasochism in his relationship to Cordelia. He begins the relationship by turning himself into an object in order to observe Cordelia's becoming a subject. Everything he does he does solely for the sake of eliciting her response. And yet,

insofar as he is in control of the situation, Johannes is the subject of the relationship and Cordelia is the object. In the end, Johannes wreaks his revenge on Cordelia for being what he cannot be by making her like him-- by converting her from her immediacy to reflection. A relationship which began with Johannes' attempt vicariously to experience Cordelia's immediacy ends with Cordelia's becoming reflective.

The question which now comes to occupy A's attention, of course, has nothing to do with Cordelia. Instead, it has to do with his ability to satisfy the demands of the aesthetic sphere now that his relationship with her has come to an end-- or, rather, now that his relationship to Johannes' relationship to her has come to an end. Now that Cordelia-- and, by extension, no actual woman-- can be the source of the immediate experience which A enjoys absolutely in reflection, the question becomes how A will seek to have absolute enjoyment in reflection? A's answer appears in "Shadowgraphs", an essay which he writes, significantly, as a member of the *Symparanekromenoi*, a society seeking to reveal the secrets of melancholy. A will reflect upon women-- in this case, women at a distance, fictional characters-- who, like Cordelia, have been betrayed by their lovers and, as a result, have been forced into various forms of reflection.

4

"Shadowgraphs"

The fact that A writes "Shadowgraphs" as a member of the Symparanekromenoi is an indication of an important shift in the direction of his aesthetic aspirations. A describes the Symparanekromenoi as "...a society that knows but a single passion: a sympathetic interest in the secrets of sorrow". (E/O I,172) The identification of passionate interest with an interest in "the secrets of sorrow" hardly seems characteristic of a person in the aesthetic sphere of existence. But A has worked himself into something of a bind here. In the "Diapsalmata" he recognized that the attempt to enjoy his own immediate experiences absolutely in reflection was a form of despair. In the "Diary of the Seducer", he recognized that the attempt to enjoy someone else's immediate experiences absolutely in reflection was inherently unstable because it either eventuated in a commitment to the other person or it precipitated the other person out of her immediacy and into reflection. Now A in a sense attempts to make the best out of a bad situation by making the very loss of immediacy the object of his reflection. In continuity with the method of the "Diary of the Seducer", A reflects not on his own loss of immediacy

but on the loss of immediacy of a girl like Cordelia.

A refers to this kind of loss of immediacy as "reflective grief". Unlike the kind of reflection which A employed in "The Rotation Method" and the "Diary of the Seducer", reflective grief preserves the individual's relationship to an immediate situation rather than destroying it. The fact that the immediate situation to which reflective grief relates itself involves a deception such as Johannes' deception of Cordelia is crucial to the existence of reflective grief:

The circumstance which gives rise to grief of this reflective type may lie partly in the subjective nature of the individual, partly in the objective grief, or in the occasion for it. An abnormally reflective individual will transform every sorrow that comes to him into reflective grief, since his individual make-up and the organization of his personality make it impossible for him to assimilate his sorrow in an immediate manner. This is a morbid condition, however, which does not interest us particularly, since in this way every accidental phenomenon can undergo a metamorphosis which transforms it into reflective grief. It is another matter when the objective grief, or its occasion in the individual, itself nourishes the reflection which makes the grief a reflective grief. This is everywhere the case when the objective grief is not complete, when it leaves a doubt behind, whatever be the specific nature of this doubt. (E/O I, 169)

A, it should be obvious, is "an abnormally reflective individual" who "transforms every sorrow that comes to him into reflective grief". Because immediate experience is vulnerable in principle, A transforms immediate experience into invulnerable reflective experience. But the women whom A discusses in "Shadowgraphs" are not similarly

reflective. Their particular immediate situations, and not immediacy in general, precipitate their reflective grief. Or, rather, the meanings of their particular immediate situations precipitate their reflective grief. Precisely because these women have been deceived, they use their reflection to attempt to get clear about the meaning of their situation.

Thus, A's interest in the women he discusses in "Shadowgraphs" is that, through his reflection upon their reflective grief, he can maintain a vicarious relationship to an immediate situation. But equally important to A is the fact that, thanks to the peculiar nature of reflective grief, this vicarious relationship demands a particular kind of reflection. Unlike immediate grief, which expresses itself directly and which artists therefore can represent, reflective grief does not express itself directly. Poets and psychologists therefore must ferret it out imaginatively. Similarly, while immediate grief exhausts itself in its direct expression, reflective grief is inexhaustible. Thus, the poet's work is never done: "Reflective grief...cannot be represented artistically, partly because it never is, but is always in the process of becoming, and partly it is indifferent to and unconcerned with the external and the visible". (E/O I, 170)

Thus, reflective grief is the ideal object of A's attempt to enjoy immediate experience absolutely in reflection. After describing the general characteristics

of reflective grief in the opening pages of "Shadowgraphs", A turns his attention, in the remainder of the essay, to three different types of reflective grief as they manifest themselves in three different literary characters-- Marie Beaumarchais in Goethe's Clavigo, Donna Elvira in Don Juan, and Margaret in Goethe's Faust. For our purposes, it is not necessary to describe these three types in detail; it will suffice simply to mention them in passing.

As we mentioned above, A claims that reflective grief always involves a deception. The difference in the three types of reflective grief involves a difference in the type of deception which each involves. Marie Beaumarchais reflects about the facts of the case-- about whether a deception has or has not occurred. Donna Elvira accepts the fact of the deception but reflects about the proper interpretation of the fact. Margaret is in the most difficult position of all. Faust made himself the absolute content of her life. When he leaves her, she therefore loses the whole content of her life and is driven to reflection. But her reflection can find no foothold from which even to begin to understand her situation. All of the terms in which she might understand it she received from Faust but his deception of her has precisely called all of those terms into question. Thus, Margaret's reflection is completely paralyzed-- at the very same time she is both reflecting herself into her situation and reflecting herself out of it.

But A recognizes that the situation of each of these three characters-- and, thus, his own situations-- is inherently unstable. In each case, it is possible for the woman involved to reflect in such a way as to reflect herself out of her immediate situation rather than reflecting herself further into it. To reflect in this way would be to leap into the ethical sphere of existence. Indeed, from the perspective of the ethical sphere, reflective grief is precisely the attempt to cover up the despair of the aesthetic sphere of existence. This clearest in the case of Donna Elvira who, unlike Marie or Margaret when they first meet Clavigo and Faust, was already an autonomous individual with a fair degree of reflection when she met Don Juan. Furthermore, the facts of the case are established for her as they are not for Marie and these facts are relative and not absolute as they are for Margaret. Thus, it is fairly clear in Donna Elvira's case that she is the source of her attachment to her situation:

The fact that Marie had to go on was in itself so controversial that reflection with all its exigency could not help seizing it immediately. But with respect to Elvira, the factual proof for Don Juan's deception seems so evident that it is not easy to see how reflection can get hold of it.... Here two possibilities present themselves, either to go on under ethical and religious categories, or to preserve her love for Juan. If she adopts the first, she places herself outside the range of our interest...This will probably be difficult for her, however, for to make it possible she must first despair.... For her own sake, consequently, she must love Don Juan; it is self-defense which bids her to do it, and this is the spur of reflection which drives

her to fix her eyes upon this paradox: can she love him although he has deceived her. Whenever despair would take hold of her, she seeks refuge in the memory of Don Juan's love, and in order to make herself secure in this refuge, she is tempted to think that he is no deceiver, although she thinks this thought in many ways. (E/O I, 296-297)

To describe the instability of the positions of Marie, Donna Elvira and Margaret is, of course, to describe the instability of A's own position. Just as these three women reflect themselves into their immediate situations in order to avoid the despair of reflecting themselves out of their immediate situations, so A reflects himself into their reflective grief in order to avoid the despair of reflecting himself out of his immediacy. Reflection upon reflective grief is an attempt to avoid a confrontation with the demands of the ethical sphere of existence.

A's recognition of the instability of the position he takes up in "Shadowgraphs" does not, however, result in his leaping into the ethical sphere of existence. A still has a few aesthetic cards up his sleeve. His next card is the position he takes up in "The Ancient Tragical Motif as Reflected in the Modern". To that essay we now turn.

5

"The Ancient Tragical Motif
as Reflected in the Modern"

As we saw at the conclusion of the last section, A recognizes that reflective grief-- and, hence, his reflection about reflective grief-- is an attempt to avoid reflective despair. This recognition forces A to confront directly the question which he confronted indirectly in all of the essays which followed "The Musical Erotic"-- namely, is it possible to maintain a reflective relationship to an immediate situation? This question has tremendous import for A because, if the answer to it is negative, all of A's attempts to solve the problem of the present age by enjoying immediate experience absolutely in reflection will have been condemned to failure in advance. Reflection will have reflected A out of immediate situations but it will not be able to reflect him back into them.

One result of A's direct confrontation with the question of whether it is possible to maintain a reflective relationship to an immediate situation is the most cogent and convincing analysis of the problem of the present age in all of A's writings. The loss of the possibility of maintaining a reflective relationship to an immediate

situation ultimately means, for A, the loss of the tragic. The question of "The Ancient Tragical Motif" is whether there might be a form of the tragic which could exist in the present age and which would provide the kind of reflective relationship to an immediate situation which would be appropriate to the present age. To find a place for the tragic in the present age is to save it from despair: "...when the age loses the tragic, it gains despair". (E/O I, 143)

A's discussion of the relationship between the present age and the tragic necessarily involves a comparison between ancient and modern tragedy and, by extension, ancient and modern culture. A contends that the difference between individuals in ancient tragedy and modern individuals is that the actions of the former are determined by their immediate situations while the actions of the latter are determined by their own reflection. The actions of individuals in ancient tragedy are determined by their immediate situations as fathers and sons, kings and subjects, and so on. Their actions are not the products of their own free decisions. The actions of individuals in the present age, on the other hand, are not determined by any immediate situation. The actions of individuals in the present age are the products of their own free decisions:

The peculiarity of ancient tragedy is that the action does not issue exclusively from character, that the action does not find its sufficient explanation in subjective reflection and decision, but that the action itself has a relative admixture of suffering [passion,

passio]..... The reason for this naturally lies in the fact that the ancient world did not have subjectivity fully self-conscious and reflective. Even if the individual moved freely, he still rested in the substantial categories of state, family, and destiny.... In modern times...situation and character are really predominant. The tragic hero, conscious of himself as a subject, is fully reflective, and this reflection has not only reflected him out of every immediate relation to state, race, and destiny, but has often reflected him out of his own preceding life. (E/O I, 141)

The difference in the respective significances of immediacy and reflection in ancient and modern tragedy is reflected in the difference between ancient guilt and modern guilt. In ancient tragedy, guilt resides both in the individual and in his immediate situation. In modern tragedy, guilt resides solely in the individual:

But just as the action in Greek tragedy is intermediate between activity and passivity (action and suffering), so is also the hero's guilt, and therein lies the tragic collision.... Hence, it is certainly a misunderstanding of the tragic, when our age strives to let the whole tragic destiny become transubstantiated in individuality and subjectivity. One would know nothing to say about the hero's past life, one would throw his whole life upon his shoulders, as being the result of his own acts, would make him accountable for everything, but in so doing, one would also transform his aesthetic guilt into an ethical one. (E/O I, 142)

Finally, and not surprisingly, the difference between ancient guilt and modern guilt is reflected in a difference between ancient compassion and modern compassion: "The same thing may also be explained from another side, with regard to the mood which the tragedy evokes in the spectator". (E/O I, 145) In ancient tragedy, we have compassion for an

individual precisely insofar as he is not totally responsible for his own situation. Compassion "corresponds to the tragic guilt, and therefore, it has the same dialectic as the concept of guilt". (E/O I, 145) In modern tragedy, on the other hand, we have no such compassion because the individual is totally responsible for his own situation:

...that which in a stricter sense is to be called the tragedy of suffering has really lost its tragic interest, for the power from which the suffering comes has lost its significance, and the spectators cry: 'Heaven helps those who help themselves!' In other words, the spectator has lost his compassion; but compassion is, in a subjective as well as in an objective sense, the precise expression for the tragic. (E/O I, 147)

Thus, to sum up A's account of the differences between ancient and modern tragedy and ancient and modern culture: In ancient tragedy and ancient culture, action is determined by an immediate situation while in modern tragedy and modern culture, action is determined by reflection. In ancient tragedy and ancient culture, guilt resides in both the individual and the immediate situation while in modern tragedy and modern culture guilt resides solely in the individual. Finally, in ancient tragedy and ancient culture, we have compassion for the individual because he is not totally responsible for his situation while in modern tragedy and modern culture we have no compassion because the individual is totally responsible for his situation.

A provides a coherent and, indeed, quite plausible, account, then, of the differences between ancient culture and modern culture. And yet, A's analysis of modern culture cannot help but give us pause. For, despite the plausibility of A's analysis of it, modern culture seems to provide as much evidence to contradict A's analysis as it does to confirm it. Contrary to A's claims, modern culture seems to have equalled-- if not, in fact, to have surpassed-- previous cultural epochs in the construction of elaborate theoretical and practical defenses of individuals against the charge that they are totally responsible for their actions. Psychoanalysis is but one example of a theoretical defense; the use of psychoanalysis in criminal defense cases is but one example of a practical defense. Various forms of psychological behaviorism, of economic and social determinism, and so on, have played similar-- if not necessarily similarly important-- roles in modern culture. In the light of what we now know about the development and influence of psychology in the twentieth century, the example which A uses to illustrate the modern conviction that the individual is totally responsible for his own actions can be understood as lacking in historical foresight and seemingly can be dismissed accordingly:

If one wished to represent an individual whom an unhappy childhood had influenced so disturbingly that these influences occasioned his downfall, such a defense would simply not appeal to the present age.... It would know nothing about such coddling; without further ceremony, it

holds every individual responsible for his own life. (E/O I, 142-143)

Before dismissing A-- and, in this case, it seems fair to say, Kierkegaard himself-- as understandably but unfortunately lacking in historical foresight, it is important to examine the constructive side of A's project in "The Ancient Tragical Motif". Having outlined the differences between ancient and modern tragedy, A next proposes to rewrite an ancient tragedy-- Antigone-- as a modern tragedy. His purpose in doing so is not to provide a concrete illustration of the differences between ancient and modern tragedy which he analyzed abstractly. Rather, it is to discover whether there exists a modern form of ancient tragedy-- in other words, whether there are modern forms of immediacy, of guilt and of compassion which, while not identical to the ancient forms, resemble them nonetheless. This constructive project, however, seems to place A at a lesser remove from some of the theories with which he initially appeared to be in complete conflict-- and, in particular, from Freudian psychology. Freud, after all, virtually singlehandedly made the Oedipus tragedy central to our contemporary self-understanding. And though Freud and A's explicitly-stated goals are at cross-purposes insofar as the aim of Freudian therapy is to give the individual reflective release from his immediate situation while A's aim is to release the individual from his reflection by giving him an immediate situation, their descriptions of a peculiarly modern form of immediacy are

strikingly similar. We can appreciate this similarity if we turn to A's modern Antigone itself.

A introduces his modern Antigone by contrasting the modern meanings of immediacy, guilt and compassion with their meanings in the ancient Antigone. Thus, for A, reflective unawareness of the tragic significance of her immediate situation is a definitive characteristic of the ancient Antigone. This absence of reflective awareness derives from the fact that Antigone's situation is immediately given and is not at all the product of her own reflective decision. In other words, since Antigone's situation could not be other than it is since Greek tragedy has no notion that reflection about a situation can make a difference in the situation-- Antigone's situation has the meaning it has completely independently of her consciousness of it:

In the Greek tragedy Antigone is not at all concerned about her father's unhappy destiny. This rests like an impenetrable sorrow over the whole family. Antigone lives as carefree as any other young Grecian maiden.... However, it should by no means be said that it is thoughtlessness, or that the particular individual stands alone by himself, without worrying about his relationship to the family. But that is genuinely Greek. Life-relationships are once and for all assigned to them, like the heaven under which they live. If this is dark and cloudy, it is also unchangeable. This furnishes the keynote of the Greek soul, and this is sorrow, not pain. (E/O I, 153-154)

The ancient Antigone's guilt is the correlate of her lack of consciousness of the tragic significance of her immediate situation. The guilt which Antigone incurs by

burying her brother in defiance of the king's prohibition is not the guilt of a freely chosen action. Rather, it is the guilt she incurs because she is the daughter of Oedipus:

In Antigone the tragic guilt concentrates itself about one definite point, that she had buried her brother in defiance of the king's prohibition.... That which in the Greek sense affords the tragic interest is that Oedipus' sorrowful destiny re-echoes in the brother's unhappy death, in the sister's collision with a simple human prohibition; it is, so to say, the after effects, the tragic destiny of Oedipus, ramifying in every branch of his family.... When, therefore, Antigone in defiance of the king's prohibition resolves to bury her brother, we do not see in this so much a free action on her part as a fateful necessity, which visits the sins of the fathers upon the children. There is indeed enough freedom of action in this to make us love Antigone for her sisterly affection, but in the necessity of fate there is also, as it were, a higher refrain which envelops not only the life of Oedipus but also his entire family. (E/O I, 154)

And, finally, the peculiar nature of Antigone's relationship to her immediate situation and Antigone's peculiar form of guilt produce a peculiar kind of compassion in the spectator. Our compassion is not directed towards Antigone as an individual but towards the whole world of which she is a part-- or, rather, towards the fact that individuals are caught up in this kind of world:

This is the totality which makes the sorrow of the spectator so infinitely deep. It is not an individual who goes down, it is a small world, it is the objective sorrow, which, released, now advances in its own terrible consistency, like a force of nature, and Antigone's unhappy fate, an echo of her father's, is an intensified sorrow.

(E/O I, 154)

Now, as we saw above, A contends that immediacy, guilt and compassion undergo definite transformations of meaning in modern culture. Thus, to begin with the case of immediacy, the immediate situations of individuals in the present age are not simply given. If an individual identifies himself with a social role, such as being a father or being a teacher, it is because he has reflectively chosen to do so. This is not to say that certain roles-- being a son or a daughter, for example-- are not immediately given and that children may not suffer for the deeds of their parents without having decided to do so. But it is to say that such cases are the exception and not the rule:

...one would not wish to be so isolated, so unnatural, that one would not regard the family as a whole, of which one must say that when one member suffers, all suffer. One does this unvoluntarily, otherwise why is a particular individual so afraid that another member of the family may bring disgrace upon it, unless because he feels that he will suffer thereby? This suffering the individual must obviously endure, whether he will or not.... But since the point of departure is the individual, not the family, this forced suffering is maximum: one feels that man cannot completely become master over his natural relationship, yet desires this as far as possible. (E/O I, 157-158)

And because reflection determines the individual's relationship to his immediate situation, the individual is conscious of the meaning of his situation for him. Unlike the ancient Antigone, the modern individual cannot be reflectively unaware of the meaning of his own situation,

since that meaning is, by definition, mediated through his own consciousness.

Insofar as the present age rejects the idea that individual action is determined by an immediate situation, it also must reject the idea that an individual participates in any other guilt than his own:

The dialectic...which sets the guilt of the race or the family in connection with a particular subject, so that he not only suffers under it-- for this is a natural consequence against which one would vainly try to harden himself-- but bears the guilt, participates in it, this dialectic is foreign to us, has nothing compelling for the modern mind. (E/O I, 157)

But if individual action is not determined by an immediate situation and if guilt therefore resides in the individual and not in the situation, compassion cannot be directed towards individuals insofar as they are caught up in their situations. Thus, as we saw above, compassion simply drops out of the modern picture. A does not contrast the compassion we feel for the ancient Antigone with modern compassion because there is quite simply nothing with which to contrast it.

Having contrasted the meanings of immediacy, guilt and compassion in the ancient Antigone with their modern meanings, A now is in a position to define the conditions which a modern Antigone must meet. She must be determined by her immediate situation and yet she must reflectively determine her immediate situation. She must participate in the guilt of her immediate situation and yet she must

reflectively decide to participate in it. As he did in the cases of the respective relationships between immediacy and reflection in the "Diary of the Seducer" and in "Shadowgraphs", A claims that only a woman can combine immediacy and reflection in the manner which befits modern tragedy:

I use a feminine figure because I firmly believe that a feminine nature will be best adapted for showing the difference. As woman she will have substantiality enough for sorrow to show itself, but as belonging in a reflective world, she will have reflection enough to mark the pain. In order to experience sorrow, the tragic guilt must vacillate between guilt and innocence; that whereby the guilt passes over into her consciousness must always be a determination of substantiality. But since in order to experience sorrow, the tragic guilt must have this vagueness, so reflection must not be present in its infinitude, for then it would reflect her out of her guilt, because reflection in its infinite subjectivity cannot let the element of inherited guilt remain, which causes the sorrow. Since, however, her reflection is awake, it will not reflect her out of her sorrow, but into it, each moment transforming her sorrow into pain. (E/O I, 151-152)

In order to create an Antigone who meets these conditions, A alters the ancient tragedy in the following ways: Antigone's immediacy (or "substantiality", as A refers to it in the passage quoted above), still consists in the fact that she is the daughter of Oedipus. Unlike the ancient Antigone, however, the modern Antigone knows about her father's crime of killing his father and marrying his mother. Indeed, she is the only person who does know about it. She does not even know if her father knows. Thus, while in the ancient tragedy Oedipus' crime objectively

determines Antigone's actions, in the modern tragedy it determines Antigone's actions only because Antigone is subjectively aware of it. Because the modern Antigone dedicates her life to preserving the secret of her father's crime and protecting his public reputation, her consciousness of her father's crime is the meaning of her life. Thus, the modern Antigone's situation is exactly the opposite of that of the ancient Antigone. In the ancient tragedy, Antigone acts without subjective anxiety while her objective situation is fraught with tragic tension. In the modern tragedy, Antigone experiences constant subjective anxiety about betraying her father's secret, while her objective behavior betrays none of her anxiety.

The difference in the modern Antigone's guilt parallels the difference in her immediacy. As in the ancient tragedy, Oedipus' guilt is a problem for the modern Antigone because she is Oedipus' daughter. But, in contrast to the ancient Antigone, the modern Antigone is not herself guilty of her father's crime. To declare her innocence of her father's crime, however, would be to proclaim her father's guilt and to break her connection with him. Thus, the modern Antigone has a two-fold project. On the one hand, she employs all of her energies in the effort to conceal Oedipus' guilt so that, in the public world, for all intents and purposes, Oedipus is innocent. Or, rather, the question of Oedipus' guilt or innocence simply never arises. On the other hand, by

keeping Oedipus' guilt to herself, Antigone suffers under it in such a manner that, for all intents and purposes, it is her own.

Now, to anyone who is at all familiar with Kierkegaard's biography, the historical source of A's modern rewrite of Antigone is fairly evident. Kierkegaard, of course, was obsessed with the idea that his father had committed a grave crime and that he alone had been entrusted with the secret. A's description of the tragic collision in the modern Antigone also clearly has autobiographical roots. When Antigone falls in love, she is forced to make the choice between revealing her father's secret to her lover and betraying her father or keeping her father's secret and losing her lover. In A's account, she chooses the latter. The parallel to Kierkegaard's decision to break his engagement with Regina Olsen is obvious.

But the parallels to Kierkegaard's biography are not the most important historical parallels to be recognized in A's modern Antigone. As we noted above, A's obsession with the Oedipus tragedy-- though, as we have seen, from the perspective of Antigone rather than of Oedipus-- parallels that of Freud. Not only is there a general parallel; A and Freud's accounts run parallel on a number of specific details of the story. Parallels to Freudian anxiety, ambivalence and symptom-formation all exist in A's text. Thus, in describing Antigone's anxiety, A describes what we now would call its ambivalence and he describes the attempt

to surmount anxiety through what we would not call symptoms which release the anxiety but which do so only temporarily and which therefore must be continually repeated:

But anxiety has another element in it which makes it cling even more strongly to its object, for it both loves and fears it. Anxiety has a two-fold function. Partly it is the detective instinct which constantly touches, and by means of this probing, discovers sorrow, as it goes round about the sorrow. Or anxiety is sudden, posits the whole sorrow in the present moment, yet so that this present moment instantly dissolves in succession. (E/O I, 152-153)

Finally, of course, the fact that the central tragic conflict in A's modern Antigone involves a choice between a parent and a lover has obvious Freudian parallels.

Interesting as these parallels to A's modern Antigone in Kierkegaard's biography and Freudian theory are, however, they are not the ultimate sources of our interest in A's modern tragedy. As we saw at the beginning of this section, A is interested in tragedy because he thinks that the tragic is the only effective antidote to the despair of the present age. That despair, as we saw, is due to the fact that individuals have reflected themselves out of their immediate situations. The tragic is an antidote to this despair because it is a way of reflecting oneself into an immediate situation. Antigone uses all of her powers of reflection to maintain her identity as Oedipus' daughter by keeping up a constant watchfulness over herself so as not to betray her father's secret.

Now, insofar as Antigone uses reflection to preserve a

relationship to an immediate situation, she bears obvious similarities to the woman A discussed in "Shadowgraphs". Nonetheless, the difference between these women and Antigone could not be more striking. Each of the women in "Shadowgraphs" began in the immediate situation of being in love with an actual other person. Each of them began to reflect when her lover abandoned her and her immediacy was taken away. Reflection became a way of making an absent immediate relationship present.

Antigone's reflective situation is the exact opposite of this. It is not a question for Antigone, as it would be for the women in "Shadowgraphs" if they were in Antigone's situation, of preserving her relationship to her father by endlessly questioning whether he deceived her about his crime and therefore about who he was. Oedipus cannot be a deceiver because Oedipus himself does not know of his crime. Antigone, on the other hand, is absolutely convinced of her father's crime. We can understand Antigone's conviction in Freudian terms. The neurotic feels as guilty as any criminal and yet the neurotic's guilt is not guilt about a real crime but about an imagined one. Despite Antigone's certainty about her father's crime and her consequent guilt, there is no evidence that the crime actually happened. From the evidence available to us, we justifiably can conclude that Oedipus' crime took place in Antigone's imagination.

But once we concede the point that the immediate

situation to which Antigone is related reflectively itself only exists in her imagination, we can understand the attractiveness of Antigone's situation for A. From A's perspective neurosis is attractive because it is the pre-eminently modern form of reflective immediacy. It is immediacy in imagination and therefore exists despite the fact that present age reflection has undermined all immediate situations. As long as an individual remains neurotic, he is saved from having to face up to the despair of the present age. This is not to say that neurosis is created by the attempt to avoid facing up to the despair of the present age. It is only to say that, once in place for psychological reasons, neurosis also can serve this purpose and that an individual may unconsciously conspire with himself to keep his neurosis in place for this purpose even after its psychological motivations have receded. Indeed, we might speculate that women might be more likely than men so to conspire-- especially in Kierkegaard's culture or Freud's culture but in our own, as well-- if there are very few roles which a woman can assume upon becoming reflective. The man who faces up to his despair is in a position freely to choose his social role. The woman who faces up to hers has broken with the immediate role of lover-- and, by extension, wife and mother-- and the society offers her no other roles. In this situation, the unconscious desire to remain neurotic must be powerful indeed.

The modern Antigone, then, appears to have answered positively the question which A brought to this essay-- namely, is it possible to maintain a reflective relationship to an immediate situation in the present age? Because her immediate situation exists only in her imagination, Antigone can have an immediate situation in the present age.

And yet, the very factor which makes Antigone's immediacy invulnerable to the present age-- that it is an immediacy in reflection-- also makes it vulnerable. In the ancient Antigone, as we saw, the idea that Antigone's consciousness of her situation could make a difference in her situation simply did not come into play. Thus, the ancient Antigone was not at all aware of her tragic destiny. For the modern Antigone, however, this is not the case. As her therapist will tell her, the attempt to get clear about her relationship to her father, to understand why she is so attached to the idea of her father's crime and to break that attachment will be painful in the short run but liberating in the long run. It is therapeutically imperative that Antigone overcome her sense of guilt and its attendant self-destructiveness and it is therapeutically possible that she do so since the situation which is the source of her guilt and self-destructiveness is an imaginary situation and not a real one. Consciousness of her situation alone is therefore sufficient to alter her situation. To become conscious of

her situation, however, will be precisely to forfeit her immediacy in a way in which the ancient Antigone never could have forfeited hers. And it therefore will be to confront directly the despair of the present age which her neurosis has prevented her from confronting.

All of this talk about Antigone, however, should not blind us to the fact that the central character in this drama is not Antigone but is, of course, A himself. A's very lucidity about Antigone's situation only underscores the difference between her situation and his own. If A's situation is tragic, it is not because he is like Antigone but because he cannot be like her. Antigone's neurosis helps her to avoid confronting the despair of the present age precisely insofar as she is not conscious of the fact that it is serving this purpose. A, on the other hand, is fully conscious of the despair of the present age and he cannot consciously create a neurosis for himself in order to become unconscious of it. He can identify with Antigone in his imagination, and he does, but this very identification in imagination is a testimony to the fact that he cannot be her in reality. His attempt to reflect himself out of his reflection only throws him back upon his own reflection and this is A's tragedy.

Now it is interesting to note, in passing, that the individual who made the Oedipus tragedy central to our modern self-understanding was himself in a situation somewhat similar to that of A. As Philip Rieff has pointed

out, Freud was a great admirer of moral heroes like Moses and Cromwell and the tone of his writing conveys his hope that psychoanalysis could produce individuals of similarly strong moral character. And yet, if Freud is correct about the unconscious impulses which motivated people like Moses and Cromwell, psychoanalysis, in giving us reflective detachment from these impulses, necessarily makes this kind of moral character impossible. (Rieff, 284-287) Thus, Freud's commitment to self-consciousness is at odds with his moral aspirations in somewhat the same way that A's commitment to reflection is at odds with his desire to have on immediate situation. In both cases, reflection undermines the immediacy it would like to preserve.

But with these remarks we can state a conclusion which by now is probably already evident-- namely, that "The Ancient Tragical Motif" marks the end of the line for the position which A first articulated in the "Diary of the Seducer" and then modified in "Shadowgraphs". That position, as we saw, attempted to preserve the benefits of "The Rotation Method" while eliminating its risks by making the immediate experience which is the object of reflection someone else's experience rather than my own. In the "Diary of the Seducer", as we saw, A/Johannes experienced immediacy in reflection by seducing an actual woman. When he broke off the relationship, he experienced the reflective immediacy of women who used their reflection to preserve their relationships to their lost lovers.

Finally, in "The Ancient Tragical Motif", A experienced an immediate situation which existed only in some one else's imagination.

But A himself cannot consciously create a situation for himself like that of the modern Antigone. This means that his attempts to maintain a reflective relationship to an immediate situation have failed. "The Ancient Tragical Motif" marks the end of A's attempts to enjoy the immediate absolutely in reflection. In other words, it marks the end of A's attempt to be an aesthete.

Or almost, anyway. In fact, A still has one card up his sleeve. If he cannot enjoy the immediate, he can attempt to make his lack of immediacy the source of his enjoyment. He can, in other words, attempt to turn the despair of the aesthetic sphere-- the loss of immediacy to reflection-- into something positive. For A this means that, if he cannot be a tragic figure, he can be a comic one. "The First Love" is A's attempt to make the loss of immediacy the source of absolute enjoyment. To that essay we now turn.

6

"The First Love"
and
"The Unhappiest Man"

In "The Immediate Stages of the Erotic", A described the relationship between tragedy and comedy as follows: "As soon as passion as represented is denied the means for its satisfaction, then it can produce either a tragic or a comic turn". (E/O I, 108) When a reflective passion is denied the means for its satisfaction, an individual can respond by taking up the tragic or the comic as reflective attitudes. In "The Ancient Tragical Motif", we witnessed A's tragic turn-- his attempt to enjoy an immediate situation which existed only in reflection. In "The First Love", we witness his comic turn-- his attempt to make the loss of immediacy the object of his absolute enjoyment in reflection.

A made the connection between the comic and the lack of an immediate situation already in "The Ancient Tragical Motif". There he remarked that "...the entire tendency of the [present] age is in the direction of the comic". (E/O I, 138) Several pages later, he expands upon this remark by saying that "...the comic lies in the fact that

subjectivity as mere form would assert itself". (E/O I, 140) Thus, "...when a man, in the preternatural manner our age affects, would gain himself, he loses himself and becomes comical". (E/O I, 143) The difference between A's attitude towards the comic in "The Ancient Tragical Motif" and in "The First Love" is that A now promotes the comic instead of decrying it-- though, of course, he promotes his own aesthetic version of it and not the present age version of it.

The focus of A's comic efforts is the attempt to achieve a reflective relationship to an immediate situation in such a way that immediacy is seen to be nothing other than a catalyst-- or, as A calls it, an "occasion"-- for reflection. Unlike the immediate situations upon which he reflected in "The Rotation Method" and the "Diary of the Seducer", the immediate situations upon which A reflects in "The First Love" are not inherently enjoyable. The point is not to derive maximum enjoyment of them in reflection. Unlike the situations in "Shadowgraphs" and "The Ancient Tragical Motif", the situations upon which A reflects in "The First Love" are not, while not enjoyable, at least meaningful. The occasions of "The First Love" are trivial and are meant to be taken as such. The point is to make the lack of distinction between the trivial and the non-trivial the object of reflection. Thus, A describes the "occasion" by saying:

The occasion is at one and the same time the most significant and the most insignificant, the

most exalted and the most humble, the most important and most unimportant. Without the occasion, precisely nothing at all happens, and yet the occasion has no part at all in what does happen.... The occasion is, then, in itself nothing, and only something in relation to that which it gives rise to, and in relation to this it is exactly nothing. For as soon as the occasion becomes something other than nothing, then it would stand in a relatively immanent relation to that which it produces, and would then be either ground or cause. (E/O I, 236)

We can get a better sense of what A is driving at here if we compare the kind of comic attitude which A is proposing to what we might call more traditional forms of comedy. There is a kind of comedy which takes for granted the seriousness of an immediate situation and provides relief from this seriousness by providing comic distance from it. Much traditional Jewish humor is of this type. In the very act of providing relief from the seriousness of a situation, it reinforces the conviction that the situation is, in fact, serious. There are contemporary versions of this type of humor which retain its practice of both releasing us from a situation and reinforcing our connection to it. In the comedy of Woody Allen, for example, the reflective person does not know the instinctive responses which are more immediate types know and this pain is turned to humor. But the desire to be like these immediate types remains. Or, to take a different example, Lenny Bruce exposes the moral hypocrisy of the culture but only because, on some level, he takes its morality, or some morality, more seriously than it does.

For all of the preceding kinds of humor we might say that jokes are a response to the seriousness of life. The type of humor A proposes is based on the quite different principle that life itself is a joke. We can recognize this principle, first of all, in the "occasion" of A's reflection, Scribe's play "The First Love". Many Kierkegaard critics have seen this essay as a failure because the play is so clearly not an important or even particularly serious work. They have thus questioned Kierkegaard's judgement in commenting on it at the length he does. What these critics fail to perceive is that A chooses to comment on this work precisely because it is not a serious work artistically and precisely because it illustrates his thesis that life is a joke. The whole play revolves around individuals being so disconnected from any immediate situation that they have no identity and therefore are always mistaking identities. Since there is never any collision with immediacy, the play has no real dramatic structure. The play thus offers endless material for reflection-- no conditions are placed on what the characters might do, the possibilities of reflection therefore are not limited and reflection can go on endlessly.

The comic attitude which A is proposing, in other words, resembles what we would now call "black humor". Instances of this comic attitude obviously abound in contemporary literature, drama, film and music. Because

this attitude-- and not Scribe's play itself-- is the real subject of "The First Love", it may be more illuminating to discuss this attitude with reference to a relatively familiar and contemporary work rather than with reference to the play A discusses.

On his 1965 album Highway 61 Revisited, Bob Dylan takes up the same comic attitude, if not the same moral tone, as does A in "The First Love". (Dylan) For Dylan, life has become a bad joke. Indeed, bad jokes of a type which were absent from Dylan's earlier albums are present to excess on this one. Thus, for example, the humor of the song "Tombstone Blues" on Highway 61 Revisited is very different from the humor on "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream" on his previous album, Bringing It all Back Home. As the titles of the two albums indicate, the first of the two albums still asserts-- if only ironically-- that we still have a home, while the second album asserts that our only home is the homelessness of the road. Thus, on "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream", the humor of the song derives from the contrast between America's professed ideals and the way these ideals are treated in practice. While the comic effect of the song derives as much from Dylan's performance of it as from its lyrics, we can appreciate the type of humor involved by quoting some representative lines:

Well, I rapped upon a house
 With the U.S. flag upon display
 I said, 'Could you help me out
 I got some friends down the way'
 The man says, 'Get out of here

I'll tear you limb from limb'
 I said, 'You know they refused Jesus, too'
 He said, 'You're not Him
 Get out of here before I break your bones
 I ain't your pop'
 I decided to have him arrested
 And I went looking for a cop.

In these lines, we see that the singer still takes the ideals of America, of Christianity and of justice seriously, as he did in his so-called "protest" period in songs such as "With God on Our Side" or "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll". Thus, the humor of a song like "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream" depends for its effect upon our also taking these ideals seriously enough to recognize how they have been trivialized in contemporary culture. If the ideals were not serious, the jokes would not be funny.

The humor of a song like "Tombstone Blues" stands in sharp contrast to the humor of "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream". Once again, this difference makes itself manifest in Dylan's delivery, which has none of the wry and self-deprecating tone of the earlier song (indeed, the earlier song begins with Dylan cracking up as he begins the song and the band doesn't follow-- an opening which is inconceivable on "Tombstone Blues") but is unequivocally hard-edged. Nonetheless, even without the benefits of being able to reproduce Dylan's delivery on the page, we can capture the difference in humor between the two songs by quoting some representative verses of "Tombstone Blues". The second verse of the song is as follows:

Well, John the Baptist after torturing a thief

Looks up at his hero the Commander-in-Chief
 Saying, 'Tell me great hero, but please make it brief
 Is there a hole for me to get sick in?

The Commander-in-Chief answers him while chasing a fly
 Saying, 'Death to all those who would whimper and cry'
 And dropping a bar bell he points to the sky
 Saying, 'The sun's not yellow it's chicken'.

The concluding line of this verse, "The sun's not yellow it's chicken", is a joke, a pun. But it is a joke that isn't funny, a pun that doesn't work. The pun plays upon the fact that "yellow" is not just a color term but also a term for cowardice. To call the sun yellow in this sense is to set up a contrast between the figurative and the literal meanings of "yellow". But the contrast has no power because it makes absolutely no sense, in this context, to attribute courage or cowardice to the sun. Thus, the joke falls flat. Dylan's point here seems to be that our language for making qualitative distinctions like courage versus cowardice no longer refers to any actual qualities, that it has become unmoored and meaningless. Because courage has no serious meaning-- as the rest of the verse, with its images of courage as torture, fly-chasing and lifting weights tries to show-- there is no humorous meaning which both contrasts with it and reinforces it. There is no real seriousness and thus there is no real humor.

We can see a similar levelling of distinctions at work in the next verse of "Tombstone Blues". In the second half of that verse, Dylan sings:

Gypsy Davey with a blowtorch he burns out their camps
 With his faithful slave Pedro behind him he tramps
 With a fantastic collection of stamps
 To win friends and influence his uncle

Again the concluding line of the verse is a joke which falls flat. "To win friends and influence his uncle" is a joke on the common phrase, "to win friends and influence people". The contrast is between the kind of relationships we have with people to whom we have no essential relationship, where a stamp collection may be all we have in common, and the kind of relationship we have with people to whom we are essentially related. The joke would work if there were such a difference, if the ideal of winning real friends and influencing real relatives with a stamp collection really were funny. But Dylan's point is that there is no difference and that the joke is not funny. He makes this point in the verse by having the relationship be to an uncle-- not ordinarily a particularly meaningful relationship in contemporary American culture. But he reinforces the point in the chorus of the song, with its sense that the connections between family members are, at best, economic:

Mama's in the fac'try
 She ain't got no shoes
 Daddy's in the alley
 He's lookin' for food
 I'm in the kitchen
 With the tombstone blues.

The final joke of this type on "Tombstone Blues" is in the second half of the next verse. Dylan sings:

Now I wish I could give Brother Bill his great thrill
 I would set him in chains at the top of the hill
 Then send out for some pillars and Cecil B. DeMille
 He could die happily ever after

The phrase, "He could die happily ever after" is, of course, a joke on the idea of living happily ever after-- an idea common to fairy tales and movies. But the idea of dying happily ever after is only amusing if our idea of eternal happiness is intimately bound up with our sense of what it means to be alive. But when we have become spectators of our own lives-- as the DeMille reference insinuates-- our lives are not even lives let alone lives of epic proportions. As Dylan sings in a verse of "Desolation Row" which echoes this verse of "Tombstone Blues" with its references to spectatorship, death and Biblical epic:

Now Ophelia, she's 'neath the window
 For her I feel so afraid
 On her twenty-second birthday
 She already is an old maid
 To her, death is quite romantic
 She wears an iron vest
 Her profession's her religion
 Her sin is her lifelessness
 And though her eyes are fixed upon
 Noah's great rainbow
 She spends her time peeking
 Into Desolation Row.

Because we have lost our sense of the distinction between life and death, in other words, a joke like "He could die happily ever after" is remarkably un-funny.

In short, Dylan's humor in "Tombstone Blues" parallels that of A in "The First Love". The point of this humor is

to point out that there are no qualitative distinctions. This point is carried through in the form of their narratives as well as in the content. A explicitly says that his attraction to Scribe's play derives, in part, from the fact that it offers endless material for reflection because it has no real beginning, middle or end. A can come in at any time and he can extend the play indefinitely. We can see a similar, if implicit, notion at work in "Tombstone Blues". "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream" still has a traditional narrative structure. The hero arrives on foreign soil, has his adventures and leaves. "Tombstone Blues" has no such structure. Events seem to happen at random. Temporal distinctions, like other qualitative distinctions, have gone out of existence. Any event can be the illustration of the absence of qualitative distinctions.

But although A and Dylan share the attitude that life is a joke and although their expressions of that attitude are similar in form and content, one thing does set them apart from each other. While A maintains a detached, witty attitude throughout "The First Love" (though, of course, his continual calling of attention to this attitude in some ways belies it), Dylan's tone in the major songs on Highway 61 Revisited is passionate and serious in the extreme. Life itself has become a bad joke, Dylan seems to say, but it still confronts us with a serious task-- namely, the recognition that it is a bad joke. Thus, despite the

levelling of qualitative distinctions, one qualitative distinction remains-- namely, the distinction between the people who face up to the fact that there are no qualitative distinctions and the people who continue to live with the illusion that there are. "Like A Rolling Stone", which opens the album, and "Desolation Row", which closes it, both assert that facing up to the absence of qualitative distinctions is imperative. Thus, the climactic lines of "Like A Rolling Stone" tell the woman who still is attached to distinctions of money, clothes and schooling-- in short, to the illusion that she is different from and superior to every one else-- that what she thought was funny is not and that she now is facing up to her own nothingness:

You used to be so amused
At Napoleon in rags and the language that he used
Go to him now, he calls you, you can't refuse
When you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose
You're invisible now, you got no secrets to conceal.

Dylan follows this with a passionate version of the chorus meant to drive the point home:

How does it feel
How does it feel
To be on your own
With no direction home
Like a complete unknown
Like a rolling stone?

In "Desolation Row", Dylan describes life as having become comic in much the same way that A describes it in "The First Love". No one has a fixed identity. All of the

fixed cultural reference points have disappeared. Cain and Abel, the Good Samaritan, Romeo and Ophelia, Einstein, Cinderella all put in appearances in the song but they clearly are not the characters we ordinarily identify them as. Dylan sings:

All these people that you mention
 Yes, I know them, they're quite lame
 I had to rearrange their faces
 And give them all another name

In the conclusion to the song, Dylan asserts once again that the one remaining qualitative distinction is the distinction between people who have faced up to the fact that life is a bad joke and those who have not:

Yes, I received your letter yesterday
 About the time the door knob broke
 When you asked how I was doing
 Was that some kind of joke?....
 Right now I can't read too good
 Don't send me no more letters no
 Not unless you mail them
 From Desolation Row.

To sum up, then, we can interpret Highway 61 Revisited in Kierkegaardian terms as follows: As we have seen, Kierkegaard holds that to be a self is to express qualitative distinctions. On Highway 61 Revisited, Dylan asserts that all qualitative distinctions have been levelled. But if all qualitative distinctions have been levelled, I cannot be a self. Thus, we can understand all of the references to death on this album-- in the title of "Tombstone Blues", of course, but also explicitly in almost

every song on the album and implicitly in the rest-- as assertions of the impossibility of becoming a self.

We have also seen, however, that, for Kierkegaard, the failure to express qualitative distinctions is a failure of the self itself. Even though the present age has levelled qualitative distinctions, the individual still can express them. This is the possibility which Dylan, in his assertion that the only qualitative distinction is the distinction between those individuals who face up to the fact that there are no qualitative distinctions and those who do not, seems to deny. But Kierkegaard would read Dylan's supposed denial as containing a tacit affirmation. Or, rather, in the conflict between self-affirmation and self-annihilation Kierkegaard would see the contradiction of Dylan's position. On the one hand, Dylan wants to annihilate himself, to be levelled, to escape the issue of becoming a self. Thus, he continually is asserting that there are no qualitative distinctions and that becoming a self is impossible. On the other hand, however, Dylan asserts that it is of absolute importance that we face up to the fact that there are no qualitative distinctions, that we be conscious of this. But who is it that is conscious and what is he conscious of? If to be a self is consciously to express qualitative distinctions and if there are no such distinctions, who can be conscious that there are none? In asserting that it can make a difference to someone that there are no qualitative distinctions,

Dylan smuggles in the very self whose possibility he claims to be denying.

This, then, is the contradiction of the comic position which Dylan and A propose: On the one hand, they claim that there are no qualitative distinctions; on the other hand, they claim that we can and should be conscious of this. Thus, A contends that we have completely lost the distinction between the serious and the trivial, that there simply is no issue about what matters and what does not. On the other hand, A is committed to being a critic who continually calls attention to the loss of the distinction between what matters and what does not. Simply to accept the loss of this distinction would be to accept the culture of the present age which A, like Dylan, despises. Therefore, A's denial of the issue of becoming a self is, simultaneously, an affirmation of the inescapability of the issue of becoming a self.

This is the contradiction upon which the aesthetic sphere of existence finally falters. We can see this faltering in "The Unhappiest Man" where the contradiction which is implicit in "The First Love" becomes explicit and where the aesthetic sphere of existence definitively reveals that it is despair.

A indicates that "The Unhappiest Man" represents the terminal stage of the aesthetic sphere by showing that

characters whom he has discussed in previous essays do not meet the requirements for being the unhappiest man or woman. A woman who has lost a lover, such as the women in "Shadowgraphs", and Antigone do not qualify because they still have significance in their lives-- a lover, even if he has been lost; her father's secret, even if it is known to Antigone alone. To state the matter in terms of Kierkegaard's definition of the self, these women still have a distinction between infinite and finite. The women who have lost their lovers use all of their infinite powers of reflection to preserve their connection to them; Antigone uses all of her infinite powers of reflection to preserve her father's secret. In both cases, reflection sustains the unconditional significance of a finite situation.

The case of the unhappiest man is different from both of these cases. According to A, to be the unhappiest man would be to have no significance in one's life-- to have no distinction between infinite and finite-- or, to use the distinction which A uses in this essay, to have no distinction between the eternal and the temporal and, therefore, by extension, to have no distinction between infinite and finite and possibility and necessity. Borrowing from Hegel, A holds that the unhappy consciousness is a consciousness which is never present to itself. A person can be absent from himself in memory or in hope. The unhappiest man is absent from himself in

both:

There can be but one combination of these two types, and this happens when it is memory which prevents the unhappy individual from finding himself in his hope, and hope which prevents him from finding himself in his memory. When this happens, it is, on the one hand, due to the fact that he constantly hopes something that should be remembered; his hope constantly disappoints him and, in disappointing him, reveals to him that it is not because the realization of his hope is postponed, but because it is already past and gone, has already been experienced, or should have been experienced, and thus has passed over into memory. On the other hand, it is due to the fact that he always remembers that for which he ought to hope; for the future he has already anticipated in thought, in thought already experienced it, and this experience he now remembers, instead of hoping for it. Consequently, what he hopes for lies behind him, what he remembers lies before him. (E/O I, 223)

The unhappiest man is different from the women in "Shadowgraphs" and from Antigone, in other words, because, unlike them, he has literally nothing to remember. The unhappiest man has a reflective relationship to his past. His past, however, has itself been completely reflective and is therefore no different from his present. His memory, therefore, is really hope for the past immediate experiences he has never had. But because the unhappiest man has nothing to remember, he also has literally nothing for which to hope. Because he has had no immediate experiences, all of his experience has been reflective experience. But this means that his hope, which is itself a kind of reflective experience, cannot be qualitatively different from his past experience. The unhappiest man can

only hope to become what he has already been and this is literally nothing. He has no distinction between present, past and future-- he lacks the temporal-- and he has no continuity between present, past and future-- he lacks the eternal.

Though A does not discuss the relationship between the possibility and necessity and the infinite and finite factors in the unhappiest man, we can conclude that their relationships parallel those of the eternal and the temporal factors. To be the unhappiest man, then, would be to be conscious of the absence, in one's own life, of the distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal.

But, as we have seen, it is precisely this consciousness of the absence, in one's own life, of the distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal which cannot exist. This is why, as A admits, the search for the unhappiest man is a failure; it is why the unhappiest man has no name. For, to be conscious of one's lack of the distinctions which make up the self is, as we have seen in our analysis of Highway 61 Revisited, to deny the distinctions by asserting them, to negate them by positing them. To be conscious that I lack the distinction between infinite and finite-- that I have no concrete commitments in my life-- is to make the distinction between having and not having concrete commitments. To be conscious that I

lack the distinction between possibility and necessity-- that I have no identity-- is to make the distinction between having and not having an identity.

To state the matter in less technical terms, the conclusion to which A must be driven if he is completely honest with himself is that, as long as we are alive, we cannot escape the issue of the self. We can cover up the issue, as we do in the present age, or we can take a stand on the issue, as we do in the spheres of existence, but we cannot do away with the issue.

But with this remark we can see how the aesthetic sphere has, in a sense, come full circle. The sphere began, in "The Musical Erotic", with the attempt to transcend the issue of the self by countering present age reflection with pure sensuous immediacy. The sphere ends, in "The Unhappiest Man", with the attempt to go present age reflection one better by countering a kind of reflection which covers up the issue of the self with a kind of pure reflection which annihilates the self. Both of these positions collapse because, as we have seen, both of them assert the existence of the self in the very act of attempting to transcend or annihilate it.

The question which naturally follows, then, is whether there is a way to become a self which avoids the contradictions which plagued A's attempts to become one in "The Rotation Method", the "Diary of the Seducer", "Shadowgraphs" and "The Ancient Tragical Motif". And

correlative to this question is the question of how A himself might become a self.

We will not find the answers to either of these questions in the first volume of Either/Or. A himself remains in the position he articulates in "The Unhappiest Man"-- conscious of the fact that his aspiration to self-negation is self-contradictory but unwilling to confront his despair fully and to abandon the aspirations of the aesthetic sphere. To answer these questions, then, we must leave the first volume of Either/Or and move on to the second. Judge William, the pseudonymous author of the defense of the ethical sphere which comprises most of the second volume of Either/Or, "Equilibrium Between the Aesthetical and the Ethical in the Composition of Personality", addresses himself specifically to a character like A-- if not, perhaps, to A himself-- and claims that to confront the despair of his position will be to overcome the despair of his position. Or, as Judge William himself says:

So then choose despair, for despair itself is a choice; for one can doubt without choosing to, but one cannot despair without choosing. And when a man despairs he chooses again-- and what is it he chooses? He chooses himself, not in his immediacy, not as this fortuitous individual, but he chooses himself in his eternal validity. (E/O II, 215)

One cannot despair at all without willing it, but to despair truly one must truly will it, but when one truly wills it one is truly beyond despair; when one has truly willed despair one has truly chosen that which despair chooses, i.e., oneself in one's eternal validity. (E/O II, 217)

To acknowledge despair is to overcome despair-- the meaning and the truth of this assertion are, to say the least, not intuitively obvious. Judge William's articulation and defense of this assertion and, with it, of the ethical sphere of existence, are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV:
THE ETHICAL

1

We concluded the preceding chapter with Judge William's puzzling assertion that to choose the despair of the aesthetic sphere of existence is to overcome the despair of the aesthetical sphere of existence. Despair, as we have seen, involves defining the factors of the synthesis in such a way that they negate rather than reinforce each other. To define the factors in such a way that they reinforce each other is to be a self. Thus, Judge William's puzzling assertion amounts to the statement that to choose the aesthetic definition of the factors of the synthesis, which defines the factors in such a way that they negate each other, is to choose the ethical definition of the factors of the synthesis, which defines the factors in such a way that they reinforce each other. To choose the despair of the aesthetic sphere is to choose the self of the ethical sphere.

In order to understand what Judge William means here, it is necessary to return, for a moment, to the despair of the aesthetic sphere of existence as A described it in "The Unhappiest Man". As we saw in our discussion of that essay, the despair of the aesthetic sphere of existence is the despair of the attempt to negate the self self-consciously. The unhappiest man is the man who wants to be conscious that he lacks the distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal. His despair derives from the fact that this kind of consciousness is impossible. The unhappiest man is always in the position of having to invoke the factors of the synthesis in order to deny them. Thus, the unhappiest man is in despair-- the sickness unto death-- precisely because he cannot die. Death will not solve his problem because what he wants is precisely to be conscious of his own annihilation.

The despair of the unhappiest man, then, involves the following contradiction: on the one hand, he has no positive definition of the factors of the synthesis; on the other hand, he cannot simply negate the factors of the synthesis. This is the situation which Judge William addresses. If the aesthete cannot negate the factors of the synthesis, he must become a self. But if the aesthete has no positive definition of the factors of the synthesis, it is up to him to define them. To face up to the despair of the aesthetic sphere of existence is to come face to

face with oneself as a self-defining subject.

But to come face to face with oneself as a self-defining subject is, for Judge William, to overcome the despair of the aesthetic sphere of existence. We can understand how this is the case if we see how the ethical sphere retroactively reinterprets the despair of the aesthetic sphere-- how, in other words, it interprets the aesthetic definition of the factors of the synthesis in the light of the ethical re-definition of them.

For Judge William, the aesthete's understanding of himself as both negating and positing the factors of the synthesis is an incorrect understanding of a real phenomenon. What the aesthete understands as the negating of both sets of factors is really the positing of one set of factors-- the infinite, possible and eternal factors. What the aesthete understands as the positing of both sets of factors is really the positing of one set of factors-- the finite, necessary and temporal factors. The aesthete, in other words, has posited both sets of factors. His aesthetic self-understanding prevents him from recognizing this. But if he is willing to recognize this-- if he chooses to see himself as having posited both sets of factors rather than as having both negated and posited the factors-- he will have overcome aesthetic despair.

In order to understand what Judge William means here, it is helpful to turn to the text and to a more concrete description of the way in which the aesthete has posited

the factors of the synthesis. As we stated above, Judge William understands what the aesthete takes to be the negating of the factors of the synthesis as the positing of one set of factors-- the infinite, possibility and eternal factors. Judge William describes what it means for the aesthete to recognize that he has posited the infinite as follows: "He chooses himself, not in a finite sense (for then this 'self' would be something finite along with other things finite), but in an absolute sense..." (E/O II, 219) The truth in the negation in the aesthetic sphere, in other words, is the recognition that the self is absolutely different from all of its finite qualities. The self cannot simply be identified with its desires, its talents, its influences, its past history, and so on. In "The Ancient Tragical Motif" and "The First Love", we saw how A was led to the point of recognizing his own inability to identify himself with his immediate content.

The mistake of the aesthetic sphere, however, lies in its failure to recognize that to acknowledge my absolute difference from my finite qualities is also to acknowledge my absolute identity with them. Difference does not negate identity; on the contrary, it is the condition of its possibility: "...and yet, in fact, he chooses himself and not another. This self which he then chooses is infinitely concrete, for it is in fact himself, and yet it is absolutely distinct from his former self, for he has chosen it absolutely. This self did not exist previously, for it

came into existence by means of the choice, and yet it did exist, for it was in fact 'himself'." (E/O II, 219)

When Judge William asserts that to choose the despair of the aesthetic sphere of existence is to overcome that despair, then, he means the following: to choose my despair is to acknowledge that I am absolutely different from all of my finite qualities. But it is simultaneously to choose my finite qualities. To have an identity, in other words, is to identify myself with my finite qualities-- with my desires, my talents, my influences, my past history, and so on. It is to identify my finite qualities as my own, as belonging to me. But in order to identify my finite qualities as belonging to me, I must have identified the "me" to whom they belong. Thus, I must have acknowledged my absolute difference from my finite qualities in order to be able to acknowledge my finite qualities as my own.

In sum, Judge William retroactively reinterprets what the aesthete understands as the simultaneous negating and positing of the factors of the synthesis as the positing of the factors of the synthesis:

That which I choose I do not posit, for in case this were not [already] posited, I could not choose it, and yet if I do not posit it by the fact that I chose it, then I did not choose it. It exists, for in case it were not in existence I could not choose it; it does not exist, for it only comes into being by the fact that I choose it, otherwise my choice would be an illusion. (E/O II, 217-218)

Insofar as I choose myself, I acknowledge my identity with all of my finite, determinate qualities. In this

sense, what I choose I do not posit. But insofar as I choose myself and am not simply identified with my finite qualities, I posit myself. My identity with and difference from my finite qualities are the results of my active positing of myself.

To state the matter in slightly different terms: to choose myself in this way is to be in the ethical sphere of existence but it is not to exclude the aesthetic completely. Rather, it is to have the aesthetic in its relativity. Insofar as I choose myself, I establish my difference from and my identity with my finite qualities. To establish this identity and difference is to be in the ethical sphere of existence. But insofar as I choose myself-- insofar as my finite qualities belong to me-- I have my aesthetic immediacy in its relativity. Thus,

That in a sense it is not a question of the choice of a something, you will see from the fact that what appears as the alternative is the aesthetical, the indifferent. And yet nevertheless there is here a question of a choice, yea, of an absolute choice, for only by choosing absolutely can one choose the ethical. By the absolute choice the ethical is posited, but from this it does not follow by any means that the aesthetical is excluded. In the ethical the personality is concentrated in itself, so the aesthetical is absolutely excluded or is excluded as the absolute, but relatively it is still left. In choosing itself the personality chooses itself ethically and excludes absolutely the aesthetical, but since he chooses himself and since he does not become another by choosing himself but becomes himself, the whole of the aesthetical come back again in its relativity. (E/O II, 181-182)

To sum up, then,: Judge William claims that to choose

aesthetic despair is to overcome aesthetic despair. To choose aesthetic despair is to acknowledge both my absolute difference from and my absolute identity with my finite qualities. Insofar as I only can acknowledge the infinite insofar as I acknowledge its difference from my finite qualities, my acknowledgement of the infinite depends upon my acknowledgement of the finite. Insofar as I only can acknowledge my finite qualities as mine-- and not simply be immediately identified with them-- insofar as I acknowledge my absolute difference from them, my acknowledgement of the finite depends upon my acknowledgement of the infinite. Judge William thus argues that if A chooses to interpret his despair in this way, it will no longer be despair because he will see that the factors reinforce rather than negate each other.

2

Such is Judge William's method of turning aesthetic despair into ethical selfhood. But, as it stands, Judge William's definition of ethical selfhood leaves a major question unanswered. As we saw in Chapter III, the aesthetic sphere of existence was an attempt to overcome the levelling of the present age. This means that it was an attempt to establish qualitative distinctions. But while Judge William claims to have turned aesthetic despair into ethical selfhood, it is not clear how he has turned the aesthetic absence of qualitative distinctions into their ethical presence. Judge William attempts to answer this question by showing how the choice of the ethical relationship between infinite and finite which he has described is a choice of qualitative distinctions.

So the either/or I propose is in a sense absolute, for it is a question of choosing or not choosing. But since the choice is an absolute choice, so is the either/or absolute; in another sense, however, it is only by this choice the either/or comes to evidence, for with that the choice between good and evil makes its appearance. (E/O II, 182)

It is, therefore, not so much a question of choosing between willing the good or the evil, as of choosing to will, but by this in turn the good and the evil are posited. (E/O II, 173)

Only after I have chosen my ethical self absolutely will I gain qualitative distinctions. In the case of the ethical sphere, to gain qualitative distinctions is to gain the distinction between good and evil.

Judge William's choice of the distinction between good and evil as the pre-eminent qualitative distinction should not take us completely by surprise. Already in The Present Age, Kierkegaard referred to the levelling of the distinction between good and evil as, in some sense, the paradigm case of levelling. Thus,

Morality is character, character is that which is engraved; but the sand and the sea have no character and neither has abstract intelligence, for character is really inwardness. Immorality, as energy, is also character; but to be neither moral nor immoral is merely ambiguous, and ambiguity enters into life when the qualitative distinctions are weakened by a gnawing reflection.... The distinction between good and evil is enervated by a superficial, superior and theoretical knowledge of evil, and by a supercilious cleverness which is aware that goodness is neither appreciated nor worth while in this world, that it is tantamount to stupidity. No one is any longer carried away by the desire for the good to perform great things, no one is precipitated by evil into atrocious sins, and so there is nothing for either the good or the bad to talk about, and yet for that very reason people gossip all the more, since ambiguity is tremendously stimulating and much more verbose than rejoicing over goodness or repentance over evil. (PA, 43)

The question, then, is how ethical choice produces qualitative distinctions. Judge William answers this question by showing how the ethical definitions of possibility necessity follow directly from the ethical definitions of infinite and finite:

It might seem as though with doubtful propriety I use the expression 'to choose oneself absolutely', for this might seem to imply that with the same absoluteness I choose both good and evil and that with the same necessity both good and evil belong to me. In order to prevent this misunderstanding I use the expression that I 'repent myself out of the whole of existence'. For repentance is the expression for the fact that evil belongs to me necessarily, and at the same time the expression for the fact that it does not necessarily belong to me. If the evil in me did not belong to me essentially, I could not choose it, but if there were something in me which I could not choose absolutely, I would not be able to choose myself absolutely at all, so I would not myself be the absolute but only a product. (E/O II, 229)

As we saw above, the ethical sphere defines the infinite as my unconditional difference from my finite qualities. Only because I am infinitely different from my finite qualities am I able to identify my finite qualities as my own. The ethical defines the finite as my determinate qualities-- my desires, talents, history, and so on. In a felicitous pun, Judge William says that it would be a kind of "doubtful propriety"-- a dubious form of self-possession or self-ownership-- simply to identify myself with all of my finite qualities without distinction or exception. What about my negative desires and talents, the events in my past which are painful or of which I am ashamed, and so on? Do I really want to say that these are who I really am? But, in calling these kinds of doubts to our attention, Judge William is demonstrating that to doubt in this manner is to have overcome doubt. Insofar as I have not chosen myself, I simply have allowed myself to be

identified with and defined by my finite qualities. In this sense, my finite qualities have been necessary to me. Once I see that I am absolutely different from my finite qualities, however, I see that it is up to me to decide with which of my finite qualities to identify myself and with which of my finite qualities not to identify myself. Precisely because I am different from my finite qualities, I can decide which of them are good-- with which of them I identify myself-- and which of them are evil-- with which of them I do not identify myself. Thus, I have the qualitative distinction between infinite and finite insofar as I determine which of my finite qualities make an unconditional difference to me and which do not. And I have the qualitative distinction between possibility and necessity insofar as I become myself by determining which of my finite qualities define me and which do not. Thus,

...the deeper down you go into yourself, the more you will feel the significance even of insignificance (not in a finite but in an infinite sense) because it is posited by you.... For when the passion of freedom is aroused, the self is jealous of itself and will by no means allow it to remain undetermined what belongs to it and what does not. (E/O II, 227)

This, then, is Judge William's argument for the ethical self as productive of qualitative distinctions: Insofar as I am absolutely different from my finite qualities, I am free to determine which of my finite qualities will have unconditional significance for me and which will not. Insofar as I identify myself with the

finite qualities which have unconditional significance for me, these qualities are necessary to me.

Having thus seen how the ethical sphere defines infinite and finite and possibility and necessity, it is easy to see how it defines the eternal and the temporal. Judge William says:

For man's eternal dignity consists in the fact that he can have a history, the divine element in him consists in the fact that he himself, if he will, can impart to this history continuity, for this it acquires only when it is not the sum of all that has happened to me or befallen me but is my own work, in such a way that even what has befallen me is by me transformed and translated from necessity to freedom. (E/O II, 254-255)

At the instant when I leap into the ethical sphere, I break the simple continuity between my past and my present. I recognize that it is up to me to determine in the present which of my past influences are important to me and which are not. At the same time, I break the simple continuity between my past and my future. When I decide that certain of my past influences are no longer important to me, I decide not to allow them to continue to influence my action in the future. At the same instant that I break the simple continuity between present, past and future, however, I also create a different kind of continuity between them. Insofar as I decide in the present that certain past influences are important to me, I decide to continue to allow them to influence my action in the future. In making this decision about my past in the present and in

committing myself to carrying it out in the future, I establish continuity between present, past and future.

Thus, in summing up his definition of ethical choice, Judge William states:

He...who chooses himself ethically chooses himself concretely as this definite individual, and he attains this concretion by the fact that this act of choice is identical with this act of repentance which sanctions the choice. The individual thus becomes conscious of himself as this definite individual, with these talents, these dispositions, these instincts, these passions, influenced by these definite surroundings, as this definite product of a definite environment. But being conscious of himself in this way, he assumes responsibility for all this. (E/O II, 255)

He is a definite individual, in the choice he makes himself a definite individual, for he chooses himself. (E/O II, 256).

Thus at the instant of choice he is in the most complete isolation, for he withdraws from the surroundings; and yet at the same moment he is in absolute continuity, for he chooses himself as product; and this choice is the choice of freedom, so that when he chooses himself as product he can just as well be said to produce himself. (E/O II, 255)

Thus at the instant of choice he is at the conclusion, for he concludes himself in a unity, and yet the same instant he is at the beginning, for he chooses himself freely. (E/O II, 255-256)

When I acknowledge my absolute difference from my finite qualities, I achieve the kind of detachment from them which allows me to reflect upon them and get clear about them. I become "transparent to myself", as Judge William says. Having become transparent to myself, I am in

a position to take responsibility for myself-- to decide which of my finite qualities are important to me and which are unimportant, to establish the qualitative distinction between the desires, talents, influences and so on which matter to me and those which do not. Similarly, when I acknowledge my absolute difference from my necessary qualities-- from the qualities which have defined me independently of my having chosen to have them define me-- I achieve the kind of detachment from them which allows me to choose them freely-- to decide which of these qualities will and which of these qualities will not define me. And, finally, when I acknowledge the absolute difference between my present, in which I ethically choose myself; my past, in which I failed to choose myself; and my future, which awaits the conclusions of my choice of myself, I achieve the kind of detachment which allows me to conclude myself in a unity. I am able to establish continuity in my life by expressing in the future those past desires, talents, influences and so on which I choose to be important to me in the present.

3

Such, then, is Judge William's account of how ethical choice produces the qualitative distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal. As this account stands, however, it is abstract and incomplete. As we saw in Chapter II, to have the distinction between infinite and finite is to have concrete commitments. When I have concrete commitments, I also have the distinctions between possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal. Despite his having provided definitions of the three sets of factors, Judge William has not yet shown how these definitions result in concrete commitments. This task is the task for the last third of Judge William's letter. Here he claims to leave theorizing behind in order to give a more concrete description of life in the ethical sphere. As Judge William says, "Here I will bring my theorizing to an end". (E/O II, 270) "What remains is to show how life looks when it is regarded ethically." (E/O II, 275)

For Judge William, we recognize the connection between the ethical definition of the factors and concrete commitments when we recognize that the ethical self truly comes into existence only when it commits itself to a set

of social roles. Judge William describes the two general types of social roles which are the vehicles for the expression of ethical choice as marriage and friendship, on the one hand, and work or a calling, on the other-- what post-Freudians would refer to, in other words, as love and work. For the purpose of seeing how ethical choice involves concrete commitments, it is most useful to examine Judge William's account of the ethical significance of having a calling. Judge William describes this significance as follows:

The ethicist speaks briefly: 'It is every man's duty to have a calling.' More he cannot say, for the ethical as such is always abstract, and there is no such thing as an abstract calling for all men; he presupposes, on the contrary, that every man has a particular calling. What calling our hero should choose the ethicist cannot inform him, for this requires a detailed knowledge of the aesthetical components of his entire personality, and even if the ethicist had this knowledge, he would still refrain from choosing for him, since by doing so he would be renouncing his own view of life. What the ethicist can teach him is that there is a calling for every man, and when our hero has found his the ethicist can admonish him to choose it ethically. (E/O II, 296)

Even from this brief account of the ethical significance of having a calling, we can see how a calling expresses the infinite and finite-- and, by extension, the possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal-- factors of the synthesis. As Judge William says, my calling is not prescribed for me; it is up to me to choose it. And I choose it on the basis of "the aesthetical components of [my] entire personality".

Insofar as it is up to me to choose my calling, in other words, my choice of a calling is simply the logical extension of my choice of myself. Having recognized that I am absolutely different from my determinate individual qualities, I also recognize that I am absolutely different from the determinate social roles with which I simply was identified prior to my choice. But, having recognized this difference, I am in the position of being able to decide which social roles will have unconditional significance for me and which will not. My decision is the logical extension of my recognition that, having acknowledged my absolute difference from my finite individual qualities, I can choose to identify particular finite qualities as uniquely my own. For, having decided which particular finite qualities are uniquely my own, I choose the social roles which best allow me to express these qualities. If, for example, I decide that my musical talent is of unconditional significance to me, I express my decision by becoming a musician. If I decide that my mathematical talent is of unconditional significance to me, I express my decision by becoming a mathematician, and so on. My calling expresses the infinite insofar as it expresses my absolute choice of myself and it expresses the finite insofar as it allows me to express the finite qualities which I have chosen to be of absolute significance for me.

Having seen how a calling expresses the distinction between infinite and finite, we can see fairly easily how

it expresses the distinctions between possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal. Insofar as I choose my calling, my calling is an expression of possibility. But insofar as I am a musician or a mathematician, an artist or an accountant-- my calling is an expression of necessity. I would not be myself if I were not, say, a musician and yet my being a musician is the result of my own absolutely undetermined choice.

Finally, a calling expresses the distinction between the eternal and the temporal by giving me both continuity and discontinuity between present, past and future. When I choose my calling, I establish continuity between my present and my past by expressing in the present those desires, talents, influences and so on which I have inherited from my past and which I have chosen to be important to me. In so doing, I establish continuity between my present and my past, on the one hand, and my future, on the other, because my calling provides me with future goals towards which to direct my talents and desires. At the same time that a calling expresses the eternal, however, it also expresses the temporal. When I choose to express some of my finite qualities and to repress others, I am choosing to continue some aspects of my past history and to discontinue others. Thus, I establish a distinction between my present and my past. At the same time, I establish a distinction between my present and my past, on the one hand, and my future, on the other.

The finite qualities which I express through my calling are not atemporal essences but characteristics which arose in specific historical situations. These characteristics can change and, insofar as they do, I can decide to express different characteristics in the future than I am expressing in the present. Insofar as my future is always open to changes in the qualities I express through my calling or to a change of calling, my choice of a calling expresses the distinction between present, past and future.

But with this description of the way in which a calling expresses the factors of the synthesis, we are able to see why the ethical definition of the factors of the synthesis necessarily involves commitment to social roles. It makes no sense to say that my talent for playing music is important to me if I never play music. It certainly makes no sense to say that it is of unconditional importance to me if I do not subordinate all of my other activities to the activity of playing music. A finite characteristic is only important to me insofar as I express it in my activity. My calling is the vehicle for that expression. Thus, to say that my calling is playing music is to say that I have an unconditional commitment to playing music.

Social roles, then, for Judge William, are the concrete commitments which allow me to express my ethical choice of myself. They are the expressions of infinite and

finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal. But social roles have another importance for Judge William. In addition to expressing the aforementioned distinctions, they also express another distinction-- the distinction between the universal and the particular. Insofar as my calling expresses my particular finite talents, it is particular. But insofar as my calling expresses my absolute choice of myself, it is universal:

The ethicist...reconciles man with life, for he says, 'Every man has a calling.' He does not do away with the differences, but he says, 'In all the differences there is the common factor left that each is a calling. The most eminent talent is a calling, and the individual who is in possession of it cannot lose sight of reality, he does not stand outside of reality, he does not stand outside of the universal-human, for his talent is a calling. The most insignificant individual has a calling, he shall not be cast out, not be reduced to living on a par with the beasts, he does not stand outside of the universal-human, he has a calling. (E/O II, 296-297)

The ethical, in other words, claims to resolve a dilemma which the present age could not resolve-- namely, how to have egalitarianism, on the one hand, and qualitative individual differences on the other. Thus:

So our hero has got what he sought, a work whereby he might live; he has got at the same time a more significant expression for its relation to his personality: it is his calling, and so the accomplishment of it is associated with a satisfaction of his whole personality; he has got also a more significant expression for the relation of his work to other men, for since his work is his calling he is thereby put essentially on an equal footing with all other men, he is then doing by his work the same thing that every other man does, he is performing his calling. He claims recognition of this, more he

does not claim, for this is the absolute. 'If my calling is an insignificant one', says he, 'I can be faithful to my calling and am essentially just as great as the greatest, without being for an instant so foolish as to forget the differences; that would do me no good, for were I to forget them there would be an abstract calling for all, but an abstract calling is no calling, and I would have lost again just as much as the greatest stands to lose. If my calling is insignificant, I can be unfaithful to my calling, and if I am, I commit just as great a sin as does the greatest. I shall not be so foolish as to want to forget the differences or to think that my unfaithfulness might have consequences just as dreadful for the whole as has the unfaithfulness of the greatest; that does me no good, I myself am the one who would lose most by it. (E/O II, 297-298)

As Judge William's reference to calling as a duty should indicate, the universalism of the ethical sphere is the basis of its claim to be ethical in the usual understanding of that term. The ethical sphere not only claims to establish qualitative distinctions; it claims to establish them ethically. Insofar as the ethical is the universal, it is egalitarian. Every person is equally capable of acknowledging his absolute difference from his finite qualities. Insofar as I am absolutely different from my finite qualities, I am just like everyone else. I am simply the unqualified capacity to determine which of my finite qualities matter to me and which to do not. But there is no way to distinguish one unqualified capacity from another. What distinguishes individuals from each other are precisely their finite qualities but these are precisely what are not infinite. Thus, the ethical sphere is ethical in at least the minimal sense that it is equally

open to everyone, that it does not make my capacity to be moral dependent upon individual qualities over which I have no control. My capacity to be moral is not a matter of my talents, my history and so forth. Individual differences make no difference in my capacity to be ethical.

But while individual differences make no difference in my capacity to be moral, they do make a difference when it comes to actualizing that capacity. If being ethical simply meant being universal, the ethical would be egalitarian but it would also be unrealizable. An unqualified capacity cannot act. I only can act insofar as I use that capacity to determine which of my finite qualities to express and which to repress and to express the ones I choose to express in social roles. Thus, while no particular qualities are good or bad by definition, except those which interfere with the capacity of other individuals freely to choose themselves-- homicidal tendencies, for example, or a desire to manipulate others-- I must express some of my particular qualities if I am to act at all. Rather than preventing me from being ethical, then, my individuality makes it possible for me to be ethical. The ethical is as much a matter of the particular as it is of the universal. Thus, in summing up the way in which the individual is a unity of the universal and the particular and, as such, is the basis for morality, Judge William states:

I never say of a man that he does duty or duties, but I say that he does his duty, I say,

'I am doing my duty, do yours.' This shows that the individual is at once the universal and the particular.... On the other hand, my duty is the particular, something for me alone, and yet it is duty and hence the universal. Here personality is displayed in its highest validity. It is not lawless, neither does it make laws for itself, for the definition of duty holds good, but personality reveals itself as the unity of the universal and the particular. (E/O II, 268)

Insofar as the individual is the universal, he is neither amoral nor the sole judge of what is moral. He is not amoral because he does not act simply under the impress of his desires. Rather, he stands back from his desires and decides which ones to express and which ones to repress and coherently expresses the ones he chooses to express in a set of social roles. But this decision is not simply his own. Insofar as he acknowledges his capacity to make this decision, he acknowledges the capacity of every other individual to make the same decision. Thus, to do anything which would violate the other person's capacity to make this decision is unethical. He must always act in such a way as to express his recognition that every individual has the capacity for ethical choice.

But while the recognition of his universality is essential to an individual's becoming ethical, the recognition of his particularity is equally essential. I can express my universality only through my expression of my particular qualities. There is no way to express the universal by itself. Thus, while being ethical requires that I recognize what I have in common with everyone else, it equally requires that I recognize what differentiates me

from everyone else.

In short, the ethical sphere makes three related claims about the relationship between the individual self and social roles. First, to choose myself ethically is to choose a social role which allows me to express the finite characteristics which I have chosen to be of infinite significance to me. Insofar as social roles allow me to express infinite and finite, they also allow me to express possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal. Second, insofar as every person has the capacity to express his or her particular characteristics in a social role, the ethical is egalitarian and individual. It satisfies the requirements of the egalitarianism of the present age while overcoming its levelling of individual differences. Finally, insofar as it is egalitarian, the ethical sphere is moral. Because everyone, regardless of his particular finite characteristics, has the same capacity to choose his infinite self, everyone has the same capacity for moral action. But because I only can actualize my capacity of moral action insofar as I choose to express my particular finite characteristics, moral action does not disallow individual differences but, rather, requires them. Thus, Judge William defends his claim that the ethical is productive of qualitative distinctions as follows: first, the individualism of the sphere-- the fact that I choose to express my particular finite characteristics-- guarantees the existence of

qualitative distinctions. There always will be a difference between good and evil because there always will be a difference between the particular characteristics I choose to express and the particular characteristics I choose to repress and, therefore, between the social roles which make a difference to me and the social roles which do not:

I cannot see why for this cause the world should sink into scepticism, for the difference between good and evil remains, and so do responsibility and duty; even though it is impossible for another to say what my duty is, it will always be possible for him to say what is his duty, and this would not be the case if the unity of the universal and the particular were not posited. (E/O II, 268)

Second, the egalitarianism of the sphere-- the fact that every person is, equally, the source of his or her own qualitative distinctions-- guarantees the existence of qualitative distinctions. It is tempting to try to imagine a situation of moral objectivity, a situation in which we had a set of rules for moral conduct upon which everyone agreed. But such a set of rules never could take into account the full range of individual differences. We never could arrive at an exhaustive list of all of the different human characteristics. Thus, we never could get to the point of deciding which of these characteristics should be expressed and which should be repressed in social roles. Either we would have to stop short of an exhaustive list, in which case individuals whose characteristics were not included on the list would find themselves excluded from

the possibility of moral action, or we would have to devise a set of rules which made no reference to individual differences, in which case our morality would be so abstractly universal as to be unrealizable by any particular human being. Once we give up the desire for moral objectivity, however, and recognize that the source of qualitative distinctions is each individual equally, we surmount this problem. Even though I cannot know what all the particular characteristics which differentiate all particular individuals are, I can know the particular characteristics which differentiate me and I can decide which of these to express and which to repress. Thus, I never can be in the position of not knowing the difference between good and evil because I never can be in the position of lacking self-knowledge. This is not to say that I may not lack it in particular cases-- I may have some unconscious desires which are hard to get clear about and so on-- but only that I cannot lack it in principle. I always can attempt to become more clear about myself. And, having become clear about myself, I cannot be in the position of not knowing the distinction between good and evil since this distinction is up to me. Thus,:

One may seem perhaps to have disposed of all scepticism by getting duty turned into something external, something fixed and definite, of which one can say simply, this is duty. But that is a misunderstanding, for in this instance the doubt lies not in the external but in the internal, in my relation to the universal. As a particular individual I am not the universal, and to require that of me is absurd. So if I am to be able to perform the universal, I must be the universal at

the same time that I am the particular; but thus the dialectic of duty is within me. As I have said, this doctrine involves no danger to the ethical, on the contrary it upholds it. If one does not adopt this doctrine, personality becomes abstract, its relation to duty abstract, its immortality abstract. The distinction between good and evil is not abolished, for I doubt if there ever has been a man who maintained that it is a duty to do evil. That he did evil is another matter, but he tried at the same time to make himself and others believe that it was good. It is unthinkable that he might be able to continue in this vain conceit, since he himself is the universal and so has the enemy not outside himself but within him. If, on the contrary, I assume that duty is something external, the distinction between good and evil is abolished, for if I am not myself the universal I can come only into an abstract relationship with it; but the distinction between good and evil is incommensurable for an abstract relationship. (E/O II, 268-269)

Another way of looking at Judge William's claim that the ethical self, as the unity of the universal and the particular, guarantees the existence of qualitative distinctions, is to see that Judge William claims to have overcome the problem of moral relativism by doing justice to the individual differences which make moral relativism a temptation in the first place. But Judge William not only claims to have overcome the moral relativism which is precipitated by the awareness of differences between individuals. He also claims to have overcome the moral relativism which is precipitated by the awareness of differences between cultures. Thus,

Precisely when one perceives that personality is the absolute, is its own end and purpose, is the unity of the universal and the particular, precisely then will all scepticism which takes the historical as its point of departure be effectively overcome. Freethinkers

have often sought to confuse the concepts by remarking that sometimes one race of people has declared holy and lawful the very thing which in the eyes of other people was an abomination and a crime. Here they have allowed themselves to be dazzled by the external; for in the ethical realm there is never any question about the external but only about the internal. But however much the external may change, the moral content of action may nevertheless remain the same. Thus, for example, there certainly has never been a race of men who taught that children should hate their parents. However, in order to nourish doubt, it has been recalled that, whereas all civilized nations made it a duty for children to take care of their parents, savages have the custom of putting their aged parents to death. It is quite possible that such is the case; but with this one has got no further, for the question remains whether the savages mean thereby to do anything evil. The ethical always consists in the consciousness of wanting to do the good, whereas it is another question whether the savages are not chargeable with defective knowledge. (E/O II, 269-270)

Just as different individuals can express different particular qualities and still be equally moral, in other words, so different cultures can have different particular practices and still be equally moral. The issue is not the content of the practices of a culture but their form-- i.e., whether a culture has gotten clear about its practices and has decided which ones are essential to its self-definition and which are not. Thus, a culture can be accounted immoral only if it has not attained this level of self-consciousness-- if, in other words, it is in a cultural version of the aesthetic sphere of existence, acting on the basis of immediately given practices which it has not subjected to critical reflection. If, on the other hand, a culture has reflected about its practices and

decided which ones are essential and which are inessential to its self-definition, the culture is ethical despite the differences between its practices and the practices of other cultures.

On the issue of cultural differences, in other words, Judge William is a liberal. He is willing to accommodate differences in the content of cultural practices if these differences are mediated through the same form of cultural self-consciousness. It is not surprising, then, that, as is the case with many contemporary liberals, the same liberalism which allows Judge William to honor the particularities of other cultures makes him recoil at talk of revolution in his own culture:

The freethinker perceives very clearly that the easiest way to volatilize the ethical is by opening the door to the historical infinity. And yet there is something true in his position, for in the last resort, if the individual is not himself the absolute, empiricism is the only road open to him, and this road has with respect to its issue the same peculiarity as has the river Niger with respect to its source, that no one knows where it is. If finiteness is my lot, it is arbitrary to come to a stop at any particular point. On this road, therefore, one never gets to the point of beginning, for in order to begin one must have got to the end, but this is an impossibility. If personality is the absolute, then it is itself the Archimedean point from which one can lift the world. That this consciousness cannot mislead the individual to want to cast reality from him you can readily see, for if he would be the absolute in this sense, he is nothing at all, an abstraction. Only as the particular is he the absolute, and this consciousness will save him from all revolutionary radicalism. (E/O II, 270)

The logic of Judge William's cultural thinking here

follows from the logic of his definition of the individual self. Just as I cannot deny all of my particular characteristics without ceasing to have a self which I can identify as my own, so I cannot overturn all of the practices of my culture without ceasing to have a self which I can identify as my own. This is the case for the simple reason that my particular characteristics are, at least in part, a function of my culture. I have a talent for the practice of law because the practice of law exists in my culture and I am shaped by this practice as I grow up. This is not at all to deny the possibility of innovation, of new characteristics or combinations of characteristics arising and precipitating changes in the social roles. Cultures are not closed systems for Judge William. But it is to deny the possibility of a total overhaul of my culture. Thus, just as Judge William exposes the contradictions of versions of other-worldly mysticism which consistently must invoke finitude in their very attempts to deny it, so he exposes the contradictions in versions of revolutionary asceticism which must invoke culture in order to deny it. To want to overthrow completely the cultural practices which have made me who I am is an aspiration every bit as suicidal as is the aspiration of the young mystic whose suicide note Judge William reproduces in his discussion of mysticism.

4

With the preceding account of the way in which the ethical sphere claims to have established qualitative distinctions, we have completed our account of the claims of the ethical sphere. Having done so, we can see that the ethical sphere claims to have solved the problem of the present age. It claims to have established qualitative distinctions which are individual and egalitarian. And, in so doing, it claims the additional distinction of having established qualitative distinctions which are moral.

But we should not be too quick to accept the claims of the ethical sphere. The truth of Judge William's assertion that the attempt to become a self by denying my particularity makes me "nothing at all, an abstraction" seems beyond dispute. Judge William has argued convincingly that I am differentiated from other individuals by my particular finite qualities and that my individual identity derives from my identification of these finite qualities as my own. It certainly would be difficult to dispute the contention that I cannot have someone else's talents, someone else's past history, and so on. And it would be equally difficult to dispute the contention that I only can come to identify my talents, my

past history, and so on, as my own, insofar as I recognize that I am unconditionally different from them and therefore can identify them as my own rather than simply be identified with them in the sense of not being differentiated from them.

The problem with Judge William's position, then, does not derive from the initial description of the ethical self which Judge William counterposed to his description of the aesthetic self. Rather, the problem first comes to evidence at the next stage of Judge William's argument. As we saw above, the ethical definition of the self does not conclude with the assertion that I am infinitely different from my finite qualities and therefore am able to identify these qualities as my own. To stop with this definition would be to fail to show how the ethical sphere produces qualitative distinctions. Thus, when Judge William shows how the ethical sphere produces qualitative distinctions, he expands upon his initial definition of the self. Judge William claims that, insofar as I am unconditionally different from my finite qualities, I am capable of deciding which of my finite qualities are of unconditional significance to me and which are not and of expressing the former in social roles and repressing the latter. But how do I make this decision? How do I decide that being a musician is unconditionally important to me while being a lawyer is not, or that my mother's influence upon me has been beneficial while my father's has not? The logical

response here would seem to be that playing music just is more important to me than practicing law, that my musical talents just are more important to me than my legal talents, that I enjoy expressing them more than I enjoy expressing my legal talents, or that I simply am better at music than I am at law. But this response, logical as it may seem, violates the logic of ethical selfhood. If I justify my decision to become a musician with the assertion that music is important to me but I cannot say why music is important to me, I identify myself immediately with my musical talents. Or, rather, I fail to acknowledge the self which is unconditionally different from my talents. But, insofar as I fail to acknowledge the self which is unconditionally different from my talents, I am not a self at all but am simply a collection of de facto talents. There is no "I" to whom these talents can be said to belong and these talents therefore cannot be said to be my talents. Therefore, I cannot be said to be a musician. Particular musical talents may express themselves but their expression cannot be said to be the expression of anyone.

The ethic of self-possession, in other words, requires that I recognize my unconditional difference from my finite qualities in order to be able to identify my finite qualities as my own. But once I have recognized my difference from all of my finite qualities, I have no way of identifying any particular finite qualities as making any particular difference to me. I can choose to make my

musical talents of unconditional significance to me but I can equally well choose not to make them of unconditional significance to me. What I decide is absolutely up to me and what I decide is therefore absolutely arbitrary.

In short, the ethical definition of infinite and finite undermines the possibility of individual differentiation in the very attempt to establish it. The ethical undermines this possibility because it defines infinite and finite in such a way that they negate rather than reinforce each other. I am left with two equally self-destructive options; either I express finite qualities but sacrifice the self who expresses them, reducing myself to a collection of indifferent attributes not for attribution; or I choose my infinite self but sacrifice the finite qualities which differentiate my self from other infinite selves. Either there is absolutely no difference between myself and my finite qualities, in which case I am not a differentiated individual, or there is an absolute difference between myself and my finite qualities, in which case I am not a differentiated individual.

Not surprisingly, the contradictions in the ethical definitions of possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal parallel the contradictions in the ethical definition of infinite and finite. As we saw above, possibility, in the ethical sphere, means my ability to decide which of my finite qualities are necessary to me and which are not. But if it is completely up to me to

determine which of my finite qualities define me and which do not, I have no way of making this decision. It is completely arbitrary. If, on the other hand, I say that certain finite qualities just do define me, independently of any decision I might make about their defining me, I become a determinist and forfeit any claim to be self-defining. Either I am absolutely self-defining and thus lack a definition or I am absolutely defined and lack a self.

Finally, the contradiction in the ethical definition of the eternal and the temporal follows directly from the contradiction in the ethical definition of possibility and necessity. As we saw above, the ethical sphere defines the eternal as my ability to impart continuity to my life by expressing the finite qualities which I choose to be unconditionally significant to me and definitive of me in a set of social roles. I impart continuity to my life insofar as I decide in the present to express those talents, influences, and so on, from my past which I choose to be important to me and to direct this expression towards the future goals established by the roles which I have chosen. The ethical sphere defines the temporal as the discontinuity between present, past and future which derives from the fact that the finite qualities which I choose to express or repress are not atemporal essences but are products of historical situations. Therefore, I can choose to discontinue my expression of some of the finite

qualities which I expressed in the past and I can reconsider my choices at any point in the future.

The contradiction in the ethical definition of the eternal derives from the fact that, at every moment, I must decide whether to accept or reject my previous decision about which of my finite qualities I will continue to express. I must reconsider my decision at every moment because, if I do not do so, I am allowing my action to be determined by a decision I made in the past. But if I allow my action to be determined by a decision I made in the past, I am not taking responsibility for imparting continuity to my life. Instead, I am allowing continuity to be imparted by a decision which I happen to have made in the past. But this past decision is only authoritative for me insofar as I choose to give it authority in the present. Thus, the purported continuity of the ethical sphere is actually radically discontinuous. Because, at every moment, I must make my decision from scratch about which of my finite qualities to continue to express, my decisions never can result in action.

The contradiction in the ethical definition of the temporal derives from the fact that, as we saw above, my finite qualities are not atemporal essences but are, rather, qualities whose definitions and distributions change over time. Thus, once I recognize that ethical choice cannot impart continuity to present, past and future, I am left with a changing set of finite qualities

and thus, it would seem, with another form of radical discontinuity. In this case, however, what looks like radical discontinuity really is radical continuity. Shorn of my ability to determine which of my finite qualities to express and which to repress, I simply am the expression of whatever finite qualities happen to come to prominence in my activity at any particular time. But I do not have any effective distinction between present, past and future. Thus, even though the particular qualities which come to expression at any particular time may change, I remain the same. I cannot make a distinction between my present, in which particular finite qualities are important to me; my past, in which they were not important to me; and my future, for which the question of their importance or unimportance is still outstanding. While I experience changes in the relative significances and relative distributions of my finite qualities, while new ones come into existence and old ones pass away, no finite quality is ever definitively rejected or definitively accepted. My life has the continuity of a seamless web.

In sum, the ethical sphere of existence contains the following irresolvable contradictions: either I unconditionally choose which finite qualities to express and which to repress, in which case there is no distinction between absolute choice and absolute arbitrariness, I simply am the expression of some finite qualities, in which case I have no self of which these finite qualities can be

said to be an expression. Similarly, either I choose which finite qualities define me, in which case my self-definition is absolutely arbitrary, or I simply am defined by certain finite qualities, in which case I am not self-defining. Finally, either I decide in the present which finite qualities of my past to continue to express in the future, in which case I must reconsider my decision every moment and therefore never can get to the point of acting on any decision, or I simply act on whatever finite qualities happen to express themselves, in which case my action lacks the directedness which depends upon the existence of a distinction between present, past and future.

5

Having described the contradictions of the ethical definitions of the factors of the synthesis, we are now in a position to appreciate the more general cultural significance of the position which Judge William has articulated. We now can see that the ethical sphere is one particular version of a position which Charles Taylor has termed "radical choice"-- a position whose chief, though not sole, modern representative is the Sartre of Being and Nothingness. Sartre's contention that not only the resolutions of moral dilemmas but moral dilemmas themselves are the results of our own absolutely undetermined choices parallels Judge William's assertion that ethical choice is not a choice of the good or of the evil but of the very categories of good and evil. As Taylor has argued persuasively, radical choice is radically impossible because, once it is completely up to me to choose what matters to me and what does not, I have no way of distinguishing absolute choice from absolute arbitrariness. Thus, in discussing Sartre's famous example of the young man who is confronted by the dilemma of joining the resistance or staying home with his dying mother, Taylor argues:

Sartre's portrayal of the dilemma is very powerful here. But what makes it plausible is precisely what undermines his position. We see a grievous moral dilemma because the young man is faced here with two powerful moral claims.... But it is a dilemma only because the claims themselves are not created by radical choice. If they were, the grievous nature of the predicament would dissolve, for that would mean that the young man could do away with the dilemma at any moment by simply declaring one of the rival claims as dead and inoperative. Indeed, if serious moral claims were created by radical choice, the young man could have a grievous dilemma about whether to go and get an ice cream cone, and then again he could decide not to. (Taylor a, 290-291)

The self which is posited by the proponents of radical choice-- the infinite, possible, eternal self of Judge William-- is radically empty. As Taylor states:

This is what is impossible in the theory of radical choice. The agent of radical choice would at the moment of choice have ex hypothesi no horizon of evaluation. He would be utterly without identity. He would be a kind of extensionless point, a pure leap into the void. But such a thing is an impossibility, or rather could only be the description of the most terrible mental alienation.... The subject of radical choice is another avatar of that recurrent figure which our civilization aspires to realize, the disembodied ego, the subject who can objectify all being, including his own, and choose in radical freedom. But this promised total self-possession would in fact be the most total self-loss. (Taylor b, 43)

We find the same criticism of the ethical sphere in Kierkegaard's own writings. In his description of the despair of the ethical sphere in The Sickness Unto Death, Anti-Climacus says:

In order in despair to will to be oneself, there must be consciousness of an infinite self. This infinite self, however, is really only the most abstract form, the most abstract possibility

of the self.... With the help of this infinite form, the self in despair wants to be master of itself or to create itself, to make his self into the self he wants to be, to determine what he will have or not have in his concrete self.... On closer examination, however, it is easy to see that this absolute ruler is a king without a country, actually ruling over nothing; his position, his sovereignty, is subordinate to the dialectic that rebellion is legitimate at any moment. Ultimately, this is arbitrarily based upon the self itself. (SUD a, 67-69)

Or, to vary the metaphor:

...in the very moment when it seems that the self is closest to having the building completed, it can arbitrarily dissolve the whole thing into nothing. (SUD a, 69-70)

Thus, both Taylor and Anti-Climacus support our analysis of the contradictions of the ethical sphere of existence. Having provided this analysis, we are in a position to understand better both the appeal of the ethical sphere and how that appeal is rooted in the conditions of the present age. To take up the latter point first, it seems clear that the ethical attempt to locate the source of qualitative distinctions in the absolute choice of the individual is a response to the perceived absence of qualitative distinctions in the present age. If the culture does not provide qualitative distinctions, who else but individuals possibly could provide them? But the opposite, it seems, is also equally the case-- that individuals deny the existence of qualitative distinctions in the culture or undermine the qualitative distinctions whose existence they acknowledge precisely because they themselves want to be the sources of their qualitative

distinctions. This aspiration towards autonomy achieves its definitive moral expression, of course, in Kant. It seems safe to conclude from Judge William's numerous direct or indirect references to Kant that he sees the ethical sphere of existence as the ultimate realization of the meaning of Kantian distinctions between duty and inclination, autonomy and heteronomy, and so on. The definitively heteronomous act is to accept the qualitative distinctions which determine the significance things have for me from a source outside myself-- whether this source be the culture, another individual or individuals, or God. The definitively autonomous act is to give my qualitative distinctions to myself. The problem with radical autonomy, however, is, as we have seen, that it makes the establishment of qualitative distinctions radically impossible. Thus, we seem to be condemned to an impossible dilemma-- autonomy and no qualitative distinctions or qualitative distinctions and heteronomy.

It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the same dilemma which plagues the ethical sphere plagues a great deal-- if not most-- of contemporary discussion of the bases of human action. This is certainly true of liberal ethical and political theory. To cite only one example, Michael J. Sandel has argued recently in Liberalism and the Limits of Justice that John Rawls' theory of justice depends upon our being selves very much like the ones Judge William has described and that Rawls' project collapses for

precisely this reason. (Sandel)

These references to contemporary examples of dilemmas of the ethical sphere of existence may appear to have taken us rather far afield from the text under consideration. But it is important to discuss the issues of the ethical sphere in this contemporary context because, among other things, this kind of discussion can provide us with some important insights about the ultimate aims of Kierkegaard's entire project. If the ethical sphere collapses under the weight of the absolute distinction between autonomy and heteronomy and if Religiousness B overcomes the irresolvable contradictions of the lower spheres of existence, then, in his account of Religiousness B, Kierkegaard is giving an account of a kind of meaningful action which cannot be described under the categories of autonomy and heteronomy. He is claiming to have transcended the Kantian categories for describing justifiable human action. But, if this is the case, Kierkegaard is an extremely important figure for contemporary philosophy-- or, perhaps better, anti-philosophy. A great deal of the attempt by contemporary anti-philosophers to deconstruct the philosophical tradition has been directed towards deconstructing certain Kantian categories. Richard Rorty's "The World Well Lost", for example, attempts to undercut some versions of contemporary epistemology by undercutting the Kantian distinctions-- construction versus reception,

etc.-- upon which it is based. (Rorty, 3-18) But much of this discussion-- Rorty's included-- has taken the position that, once we abandon the attempt to discover foundations of the traditional philosophical sort for our actions, we abandon the question of what kinds of actions are of ultimate significance all together. Instead, we turn our attention to solving the problems of our day and to edifying conversation. For Rorty, this is liberation. For Kierkegaard, it smacks of the nihilism of the present age. (Rorty, xii-xlvi)

In light of these contemporary developments, Kierkegaard's work takes on special significance. For Kierkegaard agrees with the deconstructionists about the philosophical tradition while disagreeing with them about the meaning of human action. In so doing, he raises the intriguing possibility that the deconstructionists actually still are committed to the categories of the tradition in ways which they fail to recognize. Having exposed the failures of the tradition to provide categories for understanding meaningful human action, they give up the notion of meaningful human action all together. If philosophy cannot account for it, it cannot exist. But why is pride of place necessarily given to philosophy? Why not look for other kinds of accounts of meaningful human action? In refusing to look in other places, the deconstructionists assert the privileged status of philosophy in the very attempt to try to deny it.

Kierkegaard takes the different tack of attempting to abandon the traditional philosophical accounts of meaningful human action while holding out for the possibility of another kind of account. In so doing, he shows himself to be extremely relevant to contemporary debates about the status of philosophy.

Having discussed some external criticisms of the ethical sphere and having taken note of the cultural significance of the sphere, we now must return to Judge William's letter. For, in accordance with our commitment to remaining within the perspective of the individual who inhabits the particular sphere we are describing, it is important to turn away from the external critics of the ethical sphere in order to see how the contradictions of the sphere begin to manifest themselves to Judge William himself. As we have seen, the ethical sphere privileges the infinite at the expense of the finite, possibility at the expense of necessity, the eternal at the expense of the temporal-- in short, reflection at the expense of immediacy. Given what we know of A's attempt to resolve the parallel contradiction in the aesthetic sphere, it should not surprise us that, when Judge William becomes aware that he is losing his relationship to immediacy, his attempt to restore his relationship to immediacy revolves around his relationship to women-- or, more specifically, around his relationship to his wife. In Judge William's descriptions of his relationship to his wife we find the first glimmers of his awareness of the contradictions of

the ethical sphere.

Judge William describes his relationship to his wife in terms of the relationship between infinite and finite as follows:

In general woman has an innate talent, a primitive gift and an absolute virtuosity for explaining finiteness. When man was created he stood there as the master and lord of all nature; nature's pomp and splendor, the entire wealth of finiteness awaited only his beck and call, but he did not comprehend what he was to do with it all. He looked at it, but it was as though at the glance of the spirit everything vanished, he felt as though if he were to move he would with one step be beyond it all. Thus he stood, an imposing figure, thoughtfully absorbed in himself, and yet comic, for one must indeed smile at this rich man who did not know how to use his wealth-- but also tragic, for he could not use it. Then woman was created. She was in no embarrassment, she knew at once how one had to handle this affair; without fuss, without preparation, she was ready at once to begin. This was the first comfort bestowed upon man. She drew near to him, humble as a child, joyful as a child, pensive as a child. She wanted only to be a comfort to him, to make up for his lack (a lack which she did not comprehend, having no suspicion that she was supplying it), to abbreviate for him the intervals. And, lo, her humble comfort became life's richest joy, her innocent pastimes life's most beautiful adornment, her childish play life's deepest meaning. (E/O II, 315-316)

This passage supports our earlier assertion that the problem with the ethical definition of infinite and finite is that, once I have recognized my absolute difference from my finite qualities, I have no basis upon which to decide which of these qualities to identify as my own and to express through social roles. Judge William's description of the creation of man is really a description of his

attempt to create himself through the ethical choice of himself and of the contradiction inherent in this act: ". . . the entire wealth of finiteness awaited only his beck and call, but he did not comprehend what to do with it all. He looked at it, but it was as though at the glance of the spirit everything vanished, he felt as though if he were to move he would with one step be beyond it all."

We find a similar contradiction when Judge William describes his relationship to his wife in terms of the relationship between the eternal and the temporal:

He is married, contented with his home, and time passes swiftly for him, he cannot comprehend how time might be a burden to a man or be an enemy of his happiness; on the contrary, time appears to him a true blessing. He admits that in this respect he owes a great deal to his wife. (E/O II, 310)

One may be as intelligent as you please, one may be industrious, one may be enthusiastic for an idea, there come moments, nevertheless, when time becomes a bit long. You so often deride the other sex. I have often admonished you to desist. Regard, if you will, a young girl as an incomplete being; I should like to say to you, however, 'My good wise man, go to the ant and become wise, learn from a girl how to make time pass, for in this she has an innate virtuosity'. Perhaps she has no conception such as a man has of severe and persistent labor, but she is never idle, is always occupied, time is never long for her. I can speak of this from experience. It befalls me at times (more rarely now because I try to resist it, believing as I do that it is a husband's duty to be pretty much of an even age with his wife)-- at times it befalls me that I sit and subside into myself. I have attended to my work, I have no desire for any diversion, something melancholy in my temperment acquires ascendancy over me; I become very many years older than I really am, I become almost a stranger to my domestic life, I can see that it

is beautiful, but I look at it with unaccustomed eyes, it seems to me as if I were an old man, my wife a younger sister happily married, in whose house I now sit. At such hours time naturally becomes long for me. Now if my wife were a man, it would perhaps be the same with her and we would perhaps both of us come to a standstill; but she is a woman and stands on good terms with time. (E/O II, 311-312)

As we saw above, the problem with the ethical definitions of the eternal and the temporal is that I never can establish either continuity or discontinuity between present, past and future because, at every moment, I must choose myself anew. When time becomes long for Judge William, this clearly is due to the fact that he has no way of making this choice.

But the passages cited above not only illustrate Judge William's semi-conscious awareness of the contradictions of the ethical sphere; they also illustrate his use of his relationship with his wife as an attempt to overcome these contradictions. Though Judge William cannot get a grip on his own immediacy, he satisfies his need for an immediate relationship to the world by observing his wife going about her immediate tasks. The parallel to A's relationships to women in the "Diary of the Seducer", "Shadowgraphs" and "The Ancient Tragical Motif" is obvious. But it is especially important to note the difference. While the women in the first volume of Either/Or are all in the grips of some immediate aesthetic passion, Judge William's wife obviously inhabits a higher sphere. As Judge William's continual favorable contrasts of his wife with young girls

indicates, her importance for him is that she inhabits not the immediate aesthetic but a kind of immediate ethical. She performs her duties, in other words, but these duties are not, as they would be for Judge William, the results of her absolute choice of herself. Rather, they are the duties which are incumbent upon her in her immediate status as a woman. She is in the ethical sphere of existence insofar as she passionately commits herself to the performance of these duties-- insofar, in other words, as she neither simply performs them in the dispassionate manner of the present age nor rebels against them as do the young girls to whom Judge William so often refers.

Now, Judge William's relationship to his wife obviously raises an important question about the claims of the ethical sphere. As we saw in Judge William's explanation of the ethical meaning of duty, the ethical claims to be the universal insofar as every person can choose him-- or, presumably, her-- self. In his description of his wife, however, Judge William is not describing someone who has made such a choice. This is not to say that a woman could not freely choose to assume a traditional woman's role and be consistently ethical; it is only to say that it is obvious that Judge William's wife has not made such a choice. And, insofar as this is the case, it appears that, for Judge William, the very stability of the ethical sphere depends upon the existence of people who have not chosen themselves ethically. Just

as A's reflective aestheticism depended upon the existence of an immediate aesthetic in which his reflection could lose itself, so Judge William's reflective ethical depends upon the existence of an immediate ethical in which his reflection can lose itself. But this is a much more serious problem for the ethical than it is for the aesthetic sphere, since the former, unlike the latter, claims to be universal.

Now, several interesting conclusions follow from this apparent inability of the ethical sphere to be fully universal. In relation to the specific situation of Judge William and his wife, we see in a new context what we already remarked upon in Chapter III-- that sexism involves not only issues of political and economic power but also deep issues of personal identity. It should not surprise us that Judge William opposes what he calls "the emancipation of woman". He opposes it precisely because, if there are no others who have an immediate relationship to the world in whom he can lose his reflection, he will come face to face with the despair of the ethical sphere. Women serve the role of keeping Judge William from having to face up to himself. This fear of self-confrontation, more than a threatened loss of power, is at the root of his sexism:

Woman explains finiteness, man is in chase of infinitude. So it should be, and each has one's own pain; for woman bears children with pain, but man conceives ideas with pain, and woman does not have to know the anguish of doubt or the torment of despair, she is not obliged to

stand outside the idea, but she has it at secondhand. But because woman thus explains finiteness she is man's deepest life, but a life which should always be concealed and hidden as the root of life always is. For this reason I hate all talk about the emancipation of woman. God forbid that ever it may come to pass. I cannot tell you with what pain this thought is able to pierce my heart, nor what passionate exasperation, what hate I feel toward everyone who gives vent to such talk. It is my comfort that those who proclaim such wisdom are not as wise as serpents but are for the most part blockheads whose nonsense can do no harm. Yea, in case the serpent were able to make her believe this, able to tempt her with the apparently delectable fruit, in case this contagion were to spread, in case it were to penetrate also to her whom I love, my wife, my joy, my refuge, my life's very root, then indeed would my courage be broken, then the passion of freedom in my soul would be quenched, then I know well what I would do, I would sit down in the marketplace and weep, weep like that artist whose work had been destroyed and who did not even remember what he himself had painted. (E/O II, 316-317)

But women are not the only people who seem to be excluded from the universalism of the ethical sphere. As we saw above, one of the cornerstones of the ethical sphere is the idea that every person has a calling which derives from his choice of himself. Social roles are orchestrations of individual choices. Now, when viewed from the perspective of society, rather than of the individual, it seems highly dubious that the jobs which society requires are in every case the jobs which individuals will choose to do. Some amount of limitation on choice-- some amount of coercion, in other words-- seems inevitable and, with it, limitations on the universalism of the ethical choice of a calling. Political and economic arrangements must, at least in some case, take precedence

over individual choice and, with this realization, liberalism of Judge William's type appears to be seriously imperilled.

Such criticisms are serious and it is not because we fail to respect their seriousness that we do not take them up in more detail here. Rather, it is because Judge William's own discussion of the limitations on choice of a calling derives from a different perspective than does this one. Just as his antipathy to the liberation of women is not rooted in conceptions economic or political power but in conceptions of personal identity, so is his defense of the notion of the limitations on choice of a calling. As such, it exposes a contradiction in liberalism which cuts deeper than that mentioned above. For it exposes the fact that the real terror for Judge William is not that his position cannot be universally realized-- due to political or economic considerations, and so on. The real terror for Judge William is that it can be realized.

Judge William's clearest statement about the limitations of choice appears in his discussion of work-- specifically, in his discussion of what he calls "working for one's daily bread". Judge William is quick to admit that he himself is free of this concern: "So presumably our hero would resolve to work, and yet he would find himself exempted to a certain extent from sordid cares about daily bread. Such sordid cares I have never known, for though in a way I must work in order to live I have always had a

liberal competence and cannot therefore speak from experience... " (E/O II, 288) And yet, though, Judge William himself is free of this necessity, he insists that in this necessity lies true freedom:

The lower the scale of human life, the less evident is the necessity of working; the higher the scale, the more evident it is. The duty of working in order to live expresses the universal-human, and it expresses the universal also in another sense because it expresses freedom. It is precisely by working that a man makes himself free, by working he becomes lord over nature, by working he shows that he is higher than nature. (E/O II, 286-287)

The clue to the existence of a contradiction here is the phrase "lord over nature"-- the same phrase which Judge William employed in his evocation of the creation of man and woman. In our analysis of that passage, we saw that lordship was precisely Judge William's problem-- that, having divorced himself from his finitude, he was unable to restore his connection to it. A similar problem-- though manifested here in terms of the relationship between possibility and necessity rather than infinite and finite-- arises for Judge William in relation to work. If it is completely up to me to determine what work I will do, I have no basis for making this determination and choice reduces itself to arbitrariness. By asserting that not everyone is in the position of being able to choose his work, Judge William is able to avoid facing up to this problem. He does so by changing the terms of what it means to have ethical clarity about oneself. As we saw above, in

his initial description of ethical choice, Judge William showed how clarity about my finite qualities is a prerequisite of my ability to choose them. I cannot choose them if I do not know what they are. In his description of the necessity of working for one's daily bread, Judge William changes his definition of ethical clarity. Thus,

...the conflict for daily bread has the highly educative characteristic that the reward is so small, or rather, is nothing at all, the combatant striving merely to procure the possibility of being able to continue to strive.... The conflict for daily bread is so ennobling and educative because it does not permit a man to deceive himself with regard to his own situation. If he sees nothing higher in this conflict, it is wretched, and he is right in regarding it as an affliction to have to strive to be able to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow. But this strife is so ennobling because it compels him to see something else in it, compels him, if he will not throw himself away entirely, to see in it a combat of honor, and to perceive that the reward is so small in order that the honor may be greater. So he strives, indeed, to acquire a competence, but what after all he is striving for first and foremost is to acquire himself. (E/O II, 289-290)

The conflict for daily bread, in other words, saves me from the arbitrariness of absolute choice and thus from the predicament of having nothing to do. As long as I have to work, I do not confront the despair of the ethical sphere.

In both love and work, then, Judge William violates the universalism which the ethical sphere purports to champion. In both cases, Judge William uses other people as means of both affirming his commitment to the ethical and avoiding facing up to its contradictions. Insofar as other kinds of people-- women and the working class-- are

excluded from ethical choice, Judge William maintains a clear sense of his difference from them and of the superiority of the ethical sphere. Their situations represent obstacles which he himself has overcome. But Judge William also needs people who cannot realize the universal in order to avoid facing up to the contradictions of his position. For, if everyone could choose himself or herself, there would be no others in whose immediacy Judge William's reflection could lose itself.

To sum up, then: We see the contradictions of the ethical sphere first begin to manifest themselves to Judge William when we see Judge William deny the universalism of the ethical sphere. In order to maintain his sense of himself as fully ethical, Judge William seems to require the presence of people who cannot be fully ethical-- in his case, women and the working class. These people represent the obstacle which Judge William has overcome. At the same time, they allow Judge William to lose his reflection and not face the contradictions of his own position. Thus, the problem which confronts Judge William's liberalism-- and which Judge William seeks to avoid confronting-- is not that his liberalism cannot be universally realized but that it can. The problem which troubles him is not, in other words, that women do not have equal access to choice of themselves or that members of the working class cannot choose their vocations. It is that women and the working class might recognize their ability to choose themselves

and their vocations. Liberalism, in other words, has a deep interest in not realizing itself-- in discovering obstacles to its own realization-- because to realize itself would be to come face to face with its own nihilism.

7

As we saw in the preceding sections, the ethical definitions of the factors of the synthesis contain severe self-contradictions. Judge William attempts to avoid facing up to these contradictions by limiting the universalism of the sphere-- by excluding certain classes of people from ethical choice. Thus, he externalizes the problems which plague the ethical. He avoids facing up to the contradictions inherent in ethical choice by claiming that ethical choice cannot be realized universally.

This is one form of evasion of the contradictions of the ethical sphere, and it is the first form which Judge William exhibits, but it is not the deepest form. It does not evade the contradictions of the ethical sphere by calling into question whether there might not be a problem with ethical choice itself. And yet, if the terminal stage of the aesthetic sphere can be taken as a model for the terminal stages of the other spheres, we should expect Judge William to make a further move in his attempt to defend ethical selfhood. As we saw in "The Unhappiest Man", A tried to save the aesthetic sphere by attempting to turn the despair of the sphere into its saving grace. Thus, when the aesthetic sphere failed to produce

qualitative distinctions, A tried to make its very failure to produce qualitative distinctions the source of its attraction. He, in effect, destroyed the sphere in order to save it. In the last several pages of his letter, Judge William makes a parallel move in the ethical sphere. It is worth examining this move in some detail, for it is not an unfamiliar one in our culture. Judge William's use of it allows us to recognize that what many people take to be a disinterested account of the nature of the self actually is a motivated covering-up of the nature of the self-- a covering-up of the fact that there is nothing to cover up.

Not surprisingly, Judge William raises the question of whether the ethical might be unrealizable in a rather detached manner. He does not confess to any personal ethical failure of will. Rather, he raises the question in the third person, for an imagined other who is having difficulty realizing the ethical: "If, then, a man who is desirous of realizing the task which is assigned to every man, the task of expressing the universal-human in his individual life, were to stumble upon difficulties, if it seems that there is something of the universal which he is not able to take up into his life-- what then does he do?" (E/O II, 333)

As we saw above, the "task of expressing the universal-human in [my] individual life" is the task of expressing the particular finite qualities which I choose to be of absolute importance to me in a set of social roles

of my own choosing. Judge William's question, then, is what a person is to do if he finds himself unable to do this. His first response is that:

...he can reduce the pain to an insignificance by transforming the universal into the particular and conserving an abstract possibility in relation to the universal. For in fact the universal exists nowhere as such, and it depends upon me, upon my energy of consciousness, whether in the particular I will see the universal or merely the particular. (E/O II, 334)

We can begin to understand what Judge William means here if we imagine a concrete instance of the general situation he is describing. Let us suppose that some social role-- marriage, for example-- is the universal. This means that everyone in my culture who chooses to express his or her sexuality in a social role expresses it through marriage. I, however, am a homosexual. I therefore cannot express the universal in the case of my own sexuality. Judge William's response to this situation is that, though it is true that I cannot marry, this does not mean that I cannot realize the universal. Since no particular is the universal-- since I do not have to express my sexuality but need only to do so if I choose to do so-- I simply can choose to repress my sexuality. The fact that I choose not to express my particularity through the universal in this area says nothing about my ability to express my particularity through the universal in the areas in which I choose to express it.

But, upon reflection, we can see that this response

really is unsatisfactory. For, if I cannot express a particular finite characteristic in the social roles of my culture and if social roles exist for the sake of allowing individuals to express their finite characteristics, the obvious solution to this problem would seem to be to create a new role which will allow me to express the finite characteristic which the current social roles exclude. Since my expression of my sexual preference does not interfere with the ability of other people to choose themselves, there seems to be no ethical reason to suppress homosexuality.

But if this move is justified, the problem of being unable to realize the ethical seems to disappear. In any particular case of an individual's inability to realize the universal, the solution simply is to create a social role which will allow the individual to express the particular characteristics which the current social roles exclude. Judge William, however, is unwilling to accept the idea that no one is unable in principle to realize the universal. Therefore, he is forced to come up with a different understanding of what it means to be unable to realize the universal than the one he initially proposed. If I cannot realize the universal, it must not only be the case that I have some particular characteristic which I cannot express through the current social roles. It must also be the case that I cannot get clear about what this characteristic is. For, as soon as I am able to get clear

about this characteristic and to name it, I am able to create a social role which will allow me to express it. Therefore, if I am unable to realize the universal, it is because I am unable to get completely clear about myself.

But, having arrived at the conclusion that my inability to realize the universal is based upon my inability to get completely clear about myself, Judge William draws three further conclusions. First, he asserts that to be clear about the fact that I cannot be completely clear about myself is to strengthen my clarity about myself. Having recognized that I have some particular characteristic or characteristics which I will never be able to universalize, I am much more conscious of who I am than are those individuals who have not recognized this:

Now if it happens that the universal which he is unable to realize is precisely that for which he was desirous, then if he is a magnanimous man he will in a sense rejoice at this. He will then say, 'I have fought under the most unfavorable conditions. I have fought against the particular, I have set my desire upon the side of the enemy; to make the thing complete I have transformed the particular into the universal. It is true that all this will make the defeat harder for me, but it will also strengthen my consciousness, it will give it energy and clarity. (E/O II, 335)

Second, Judge William suggests that to be clear about the fact that I cannot be completely clear about myself is to solve the problem of the present age. Realizing the universal, it seems, is not necessarily sufficient for solving this problem. A person can realize the universal and still have a life which is insignificant-- or, as Judge

William says here, "trivial":

What he lost in compass he gained perhaps in intensive inwardness. For not every man whose life is a mediocre expression of the universal is for this reason an extraordinary man, for this would be to idolize triviality: before he can truthfully be called such, one must ask also with what intensive strength he does this. (E/O II, 337)

Reading between the lines of Judge William's statement here, we can understand what it means. As we saw in the preceding two sections, the ethical sphere of existence cannot establish qualitative distinctions. Therefore, a person who completely realizes the universal necessarily is trivial-- he necessarily lacks qualitative distinctions. Recognizing this unconsciously, Judge William reverses himself completely and suggests that it is precisely the person who cannot realize the universal who has qualitative distinctions. Thus,

Now that other man will be in possession of that strength at the points where he is able to realize the universal. His sorrow will thus vanish again, it will be resolved into harmony; for he will perceive that he had reached the confines of his individuality. He knows indeed that every man develops himself with freedom, but he knows too that a man does not create himself out of nothing, that he has his self in its concretion as his task.... (E/O II, 337)

To reach the confines of my individuality is to reach that which limits me, which makes me a determinate individual. If I have particular finite qualities which I never can get completely clear about, I never can be in ethical despair. I never can be in the position of

choosing absolutely which of these finite qualities to identify as my own-- and thus, of being unable to distinguish choice from arbitrariness-- because I never can be completely clear about what my finite-qualities are in the first place. Thus, I cannot be in the position of having no qualitative distinctions. Certain of my past influences, my talents and so on will be of absolute importance to me precisely because I cannot get clear about them and cannot make them objects of absolute choice.

Similarly, to know that I do not create myself out of nothing is to know that certain of my finite qualities are necessary to me in the sense that without them I would lack all self-definition. If I have particular finite qualities which I cannot get completely clear about, I never can be in the position of choosing which ones define me and which do not. Certain of my talents, dispositions, past influences and so on will define me precisely insofar as I cannot get clear about them and cannot make them objects of absolute choice.

But if it is precisely the person who cannot get completely clear about himself who has qualitative distinctions and if, according to the tenets of the ethical sphere, everyone is equally capable of having qualitative distinctions, then it follows that no one is able to get completely clear about himself. What is universal is precisely the inability of anyone to be completely universal as defined by the ethical sphere. Thus, in a few

short pages of his letter, Judge William moves from describing exceptions to the universal to describing exceptions as the universal:

...he will again be reconciled with existence, perceiving that in a certain sense every man is an exception, and that it is equally true that every man is the universal-human and at the same time an exception. (E/O II, 337)

Indeed, Judge William anticipates this conclusion very early in his letter when he states:

But even the man in whose life this movement comes about quietly, peaceably and seasonably, will, nevertheless, always retain a little melancholy; but this is connected with something far deeper, with original sin, and it is due to the fact that no man can become perfectly transparent to himself. (E/O II, 194)

In short, just as A did before him, Judge William attempts to turn the fatal flaw of his position into its saving grace. But it is not difficult to see that he is no more capable of saving his sphere in this way than was A. As we saw above, the problem with the ethical sphere of existence is that, in divorcing me from my finite qualities, it gives me no way of re-claiming my finite qualities as my own and that, in divorcing me from that which produced me, it makes my choice of myself completely arbitrary. As he begins to come face to face with these contradictions, Judge William attempts to resolve them by claiming that no one ever can be in the position of being non-individuated and non-defined because no one ever can get completely clear about himself. Therefore, the ethical

contradiction cannot arise.

But, as should be clear by this point, this conclusion destroys the ethical in the process of trying to save it. If I cannot get clear about some of my finite qualities and therefore simply am defined by them, I am not a self-defining subject and my actions cannot be distinguished from compulsions. In short, I gain qualitative distinctions only by sacrificing everything which initially distinguished the ethical sphere. A tried to make the lack of immediacy the virtue of a position whose virtue was supposed to be its immediacy. Now Judge William tries to make the lack of reflection the virtue of a position whose virtue was supposed to be total reflection.

Now it is important to note just what our criticism amounts to here. It would be foolish to argue that we do not have finite qualities which identify us independently of our choosing to have them do so or that our actions are not determined by circumstances which are beyond our control. The factual truth of Judge William's assertions is not in question here. What is in question is the way in which Judge William uses these obvious truths to attempt to secure a vision of the self in a way which is illegitimate. It is precisely because Judge William's assertions are factually correct that we can allow ourselves to be seduced by the notion that they do the job which Judge William claims they do.

The reason we may be tempted to do so lies in the appeal of Judge William's original picture of the self. That appeal, as we saw above, consists in the fact that, in making me absolutely different from my finite qualities, it makes me a self-possessing subject and that, in making me absolutely undetermined by my finite qualities, it makes me a self-determining subject. The vision of myself as a self-possessed, self-determining-- in short, autonomous-- subject is enormously appealing.

Unfortunately, as we have seen, this vision is also inherently unstable. Ironically, the only way to attempt to stabilize it appears to be to undercut it completely. In his insistence that the finite qualities about which we never can become completely clear are precisely the ones that differentiate and define us as individuals, Judge William stands solidly within a distinctive modern tradition. Michel Foucault has described this tradition under the general rubric of "The Analytic of Finitude". (Foucault, 312-317) He describes the particular dilemmas of this tradition which most clearly parallel those of the ethical sphere under the title "The Cogito and the Unthought". (Foucault, 322-328) As Foucault illustrates with many examples from modern thought, the positing of an absolutely autonomous ego, while it intends to make human action absolutely free and unobstructed, instead makes it absolutely impossible. An absolutely autonomous ego literally has nothing to do. Thus, the proponents of

absolute autonomy are compelled to reintroduce obstructions in order to get action going again. For Husserl, analysis is an "infinite task". For Freud, "analysis is interminable". The reintroduction of the obstructions, however, does not get action going again. Instead it condemns me to the infinite task of trying to get clear about the grounds of my action. Since I never can get absolutely clear about these grounds, I never can act-- or, if I do, I am, by definition, acting in terms of that which is least clear to me and my action cannot be meaningfully distinguished from compulsion. No wonder that Foucault claims that, given the reign of the categories of the analytic of finitude, there cannot be a modern ethics. (Dreyfus/Rabinow, 34-37)

In short, Judge William's claim that I always will have qualitative distinctions because I never will be able to get completely clear about myself is enormously seductive precisely because it begins from a premise which is indisputable-- namely, that I cannot get completely clear about myself. It is also seductive because it gives me a way of acting-- I continually am trying to get clear about myself and this activity never can come to an end. But Judge William's vision of the self provides this kind of ersatz action while making real action impossible. Judge William's real either/or presents me with two equally unpalatable alternatives-- either I always am trying to get clear about my finite qualities and therefore am never

acting upon them or I am acting on the basis of the finite qualities which are least clear to me, in which case my actions are not my own and are not free. In short, I am condemned to a life of reflection without action or of action without reflection. The ethical project radically undermines itself.

Such are the irresolvable dilemmas of the ethical sphere of existence. Judge William does not confront-- let alone resolve-- them in his letter. Like A, he covers up the contradictions of his sphere in order to be able to remain in it. Only when we leave Either/Or and turn to the works which describe Religiousness A will we witness an attempt to confront and resolve the dilemma of the ethical sphere.

Before turning to these works, however, it may be illuminating to examine one concrete illustration of the ethical dilemma as it appears in Judge William's text. The illustration is illuminating on several counts. As a discussion of the relationship between fathers and sons, it provides insights about some of the reasons for the levelling of one of the major social, hierarchical qualitative distinctions. As a discussion of the relationship between fathers and sons, it also has obvious Freudian overtones. It thus provides some insight into the way in which modern relationships have a tendency to become therapeutic and, to this extent, levelled. And, in so doing, it raises questions about the modern ethical status of relationships which were important to traditional ethics

such as friendship.

As we saw in the last section, Judge William tries to cover up the contradictions of the ethical sphere by claiming that I never can be in ethical despair because I never can be completely clear about myself. Interestingly enough, though Judge William arrives at this conclusion at the end of his letter, he provides an illustration of it earlier on. Just after his defense of the ethical sphere as overcoming the problem of moral relativism, Judge William proposes to "bring my theorizing to an end" (E/O II, 270) and "to show how life looks when it is regarded ethically". (E/O II, 275) From this point on, Judge William describes the duties of work, calling, marriage and friendship. Just before launching into this discussion, however, Judge William asserts once again that duty derives from the self and not from a set of rules external to it:

When with all his energy a person has felt the intensity of duty he is then ethically mature, and in him duty will emerge of itself. The chief thing is, not whether one can count on one's fingers how many duties one has, but that a man has once felt the intensity of duty in such a way that the consciousness of it is for him the assurance of the eternal validity of his being. (E/O II, 270-271)

Having made this statement, Judge William chooses to illustrate it with an example of what it means to have "once felt the intensity of duty in such a way that the consciousness of it is for him the assurance of the eternal validity of his being". (E/O II, 271) The example is not, as we may have been led to expect by Judge William's text

up to this point, a description of his ethical choice of himself. Instead, it is an example from Judge William's early childhood and concerns his relationship to his father. Judge William describes being sent to school at age five and being given the single duty of memorizing the first ten lines of his lesson book. He follows this description with the comments: "I had only one duty, that of learning my lesson, and yet I can trace my whole ethical view of life to this impression". (E/O II, 272) And, even more concretely: "I owe it to my father's serious-mindedness that this event made such an impression upon me, and if I owed him nothing else, this would suffice to put me eternally in his debt". (E/O II, 272)

Judge William's understanding of the ethical, in other words, comes from his father. And this means that Judge William's understanding of qualitative distinctions comes from his father:

When under this influence I regarded my father, he appeared to me an incarnation of the rule: what came from any other source was the exception, in so far as it was not in agreement with his command. When I regarded that fellow pupil who was taken out of the school, I felt that he must be an exception unworthy of my attention, and that all the more because the fuss they made about him proved sufficiently that he was an exception. The childish rigorism with which I then distinguished between the rule and the exception, in grammar as well as in life, has now indeed become softened, but I still have that distinction within me, I know how to call it forth, especially when I see you and your like who seem to propound the doctrine that the exception is the most important thing, yea, that the rule only exists in order that the exception may show off to advantage. (E/O II, 274)

The real source of the authority of Judge William's qualitative distinctions, in other words, is not Judge William but his father or the memory of his father. As Judge William says:

I knew it was my duty to go to school, to the school where for good and al I had been sent. Even though everything else were to be changed, this could not be changed. It was not merely fear of my father's seriousness which instilled into me this notion, but it was the lofty impression of what a person's duty is. Even though my father were dead and I placed under the supervision of another whom I might have induced to take me out of the school, I never would have ventured, or indeed, really wished to do it, it would have been as though my father's shade had come following me; for here again I would have had an infinite impression of what my duty was, so that no lapse of time would have obliterated the recollection that I had violated his will. (E/O II, 273)

And yet, as we saw above, it is a violation of the very essence of ethical selfhood that any individual should have this sort of moral authority over another. When I ethically choose myself, I "repent myself out of the whole of existence". I decide which of my past influences-- including pre-eminently, one would assume, the influences of my parents-- will continue to be influences and what kind of influences they will be. To refuse to make this decision is to fail to acknowledge my moral autonomy and thus to fail to be ethical at all. Thus, Judge William purchases his qualitative distinctions at the price of his ethical selfhood.

Judge William takes a quite different attitude towards the source of the authority of qualitative distinctions,

however, when the roles become reversed-- when he is a father and is entrusted with the task of providing ethical guidance for his son. In two revealing passages near the beginning of his letter, Judge William describes his relationship with his son. In the first of these passages, he says:

For freedom, therefore, I am fighting (partly in this letter, partly and principally within myself), I am fighting for the future, for either/or. That is the treasure I desire to bequeath to those whom I love in the world; yea, if my little son were at this instant of an age when he could thoroughly understand me, and my last hour had come, I would say to him, 'I leave to thee no fortune, no title and dignities, but I know where there lies buried a treasure which suffices to make thee richer than the whole world, and this treasure belongs to thee, and thou shalt not even express thanks to me for it lest thou take hurt to thine own soul by owing everything to another. This treasure is deposited in thine own inner self; there is an either/or which makes a man greater than the angels. (E/O II, 180)

The crucial phrase in this passage is, of course, "...and thou shalt not even express thanks to me for it lest thou take hurt to thine own soul by owing everything to another". Judge William cannot pass any substantive ethical guidance on to his son. To do so would be to violate his son's ability to choose himself. His son's activity would be heteronomously, rather than autonomously, determined. Thus, Judge William's only advice to his son is that he choose himself ethically.

In the other passages in which he discusses his ethical obligations to his son, Judge William's motives for

refusing to influence his son ethically reveal themselves more clearly. Judge William says:

What I have stated here is not professorial wisdom, it is something every can state who wills to do so, and which every man can will to do if he will. I have not learned it in lecture rooms, I have learned it in the drawing room, or in the nursery, if you will, for when I see my small son running about the room, so joyful, so happy, I then think, 'Who knows if after all I have not had an injurious influence upon him? God knows I take all possible care of him, but this thought does not tranquilize me.' Then I say to myself, 'There will come a moment in his life when his spirit will be ripened by the instant of choice, then he will repent what guilt of mine may rest upon him. And it is a beautiful thing for a son to repent his father's fault, and yet he will not do this for my sake but because he only thus can choose himself. So come what may, that which one regards as the best may after all have the most injurious consequences for a person, and yet all this is nothing. I can be of much use to him, that I shall endeavor to do, but the highest thing he alone can do for himself. (E/O II, 221)

The most crucial sentence in this passage is, "So come what may, that which one regards as the best may after all have the most injurious consequences for a person, and yet all this is nothing". In this sentence, we recognize an important motive which lies behind the ethical demand that individuals choose themselves. If Judge William's son is completely responsible for himself and can repent any injurious influence which his father has had upon him, Judge William is absolved of all feelings of guilt in relation to his son. He need not feel himself implicated in his son's future decisions and actions. He may still suffer when his son suffers or does something wrong. As A remarked in "The Ancient Tragical Motif", it still is the

case even in the present age that when one member of a family suffers all suffer. But Judge William need no longer suffer any guilt. The doctrine of ethical choice relieves him of responsibility for the ethical lives of others.

In his relation to his father and to his son, then, Judge William clearly is a man caught in the middle. Insofar as he wants to have qualitative distinctions, he wants to preserve the memory of his father. Insofar as he wants to be free of guilt, he does not want to pass his own qualitative distinctions on to his son. The ethical must destroy the very past history which makes qualitative distinctions possible.

But this ethical attempt to break the ties of guilt and responsibility which bind people together has repercussions far beyond the confines of the nuclear family. This becomes strikingly clear near the end of Judge William's letter when he discusses the issue of friendship. Judge William takes note of the fact that, for Aristotle, friendship was "the starting-point for his whole ethical view of life" and notes approvingly:

He bases the concept of justice upon the idea of friendship. His category is thus in a certain sense more perfect than the modern view which bases justice upon duty, the abstract categorical-- he bases it upon the social sense. (E/O II, 327)

And yet, when Judge William discusses his own concept of friendship, it becomes clear that the "social sense"

cannot be the basis of anything else because, for the ethical, the social sense simply has ceased to exist. Judge William begins by defining friendship as "agreement in a life view" (E/O II, 324) and notes that this definition is superior to other definitions of friendship because it is based upon "consciousness of its motives" and not simply upon what he calls "inexplicable sympathies". (E/O II, 324) He then goes on to argue:

He who regards friendship ethically sees it as a duty. I might therefore say that it is every man's duty to have a friend. However, I prefer to use another expression which exhibits the ethical element in friendship and in everything else which was dealt with in the foregoing discussion, and at the same time emphasizes sharply the difference between the ethical and the aesthetical: I say that it is every man's duty to become revealed. The Scripture teaches that every man must die, and then comes the Judgement when everything shall be revealed. Ethics says that it is the significance of life and of reality that every man become revealed. So if he is not, the revelation will appear as a punishment. The aestheticalist, on the contrary, will not attribute significance to reality, he remains constantly concealed, because, however frequently and however much he gives himself up to the world, he never does it totally, there always remains something that he keeps back; if he were to do it totally, he would be doing it ethically. (E/O II, 327)

In this demand for total openness about oneself lies the true moral message of the ethical sphere of existence. If "inexplicable sympathies" make us mysteries to our selves and to each other and keep us apart, total openness brings us together. Mistrustful of the trust which binds people together in inexplicable sympathies, the ethical

hopes to replace trust with open communication, friendship with therapy. In so doing, it levels all human relationships. Parents and children, as we saw above, address each other as "polite equals", shorn of any overriding obligations to each other. Since my relationships to other people are based upon open communication and not upon loyalties, commitments, and so on, which we share, the only barrier to my closeness to someone is his or my unwillingness to open up. But since everyone is equally capable of revealing himself, everyone is equally capable of being close to everyone else.

For the ethical sphere, then, all human relationships are essentially therapeutic. Given the absolute either/or of the ethical versus the aesthetic, they cannot possibly be anything else. Either I base my relationships to other people upon my ability to get clear about myself and to choose myself or I base them upon sympathies, loyalties, and so on which are unclear to me, which I therefore cannot possess as my own and which therefore determine me in much the same manner as do compulsions. The ethical destruction of the "social sense" is absolutely consistent with the ethical view of the self. Thus, when Religiousness A attempts to counter the ethical commitment to therapeutic friendship with a religious commitment to love of neighbor, it does so by countering the ethical commitment to

self-revelation with a religious commitment to self-annihilation. To Kierkegaard's defense of Religiousness A we now turn.

CHAPTER V:
RELIGIOUSNESS A

1

As we saw in Chapter IV, the contradiction of the ethical sphere of existence is that absolute choice is no choice. Once it is absolutely up to me to decide which of my finite qualities are of absolute significance to me, I have no basis for making a decision. Thus, the ethical task of expressing my choice of myself through a set of social roles never succeeds in establishing itself because the ethical self never succeeds in establishing itself.

In the "edifying discourse" entitled "The Narrowness is the Way", Kierkegaard describes the despair of the ethical sphere. In a passage which cannot help but recall Judge William's discussion of the relationship between fathers and sons, Kierkegaard says that children are in the seemingly enviable position of being able to set about their tasks at once because their parents and teachers set their tasks for them and children therefore do not have to spend any time reflecting about what their task should be. (ED 214) For adults, however, the situation is different.

The problem, as we have seen eminently illustrated in the case of Judge William, is not in discharging one's task but in getting one's task established in the first place:

The difficulty for the older person, which doubtless is also the advantage of authority and maturity, is that he has a two-fold task: he must work to find the task and to get it definitely established, and then he must work to discharge the task. And that which makes it difficult consists exactly in getting the task clearly in mind, or in establishing what the task really is. (ED 215-216)

Once it is absolutely up to me to establish my task, I am absolutely incapable of establishing it. Thus, Kierkegaard's account of the despair of the ethical sphere echoes the account which we gave in Chapter IV-- either I am paralyzed by my own power of reflection and cannot act or I act under the immediate impress of my desires, talents, past history, and so forth, and forfeit my power of reflection:

Perhaps men are after all not so unwilling to spend time and industry, nor are they incapable-- if only it could become indubitably clear to them what their task is. But the trouble is that the communication of this cannot in any decisive sense fall to one's lot from without; it must come through the person concerned himself. The adult is indeed authoritative, he is to be his own master. But it is the Lord and Master who will assign the task, as the parents and superiors do with respect to the child; hence the adult is at one and the same time master and servant; the one who is to command and the one who must obey are one and the same. That the one commanding and the one obeying are one and the same is undeniably a difficult relationship... Alas, then confusion enters, so a man, instead of being his own master, becomes unstable, doubtful, fickle; he runs from one thing to the other, he tears down and builds up and begins from the beginning, he

is tossed about by every gust, yet without moving from his place; moreover, the relationship at last becomes so preposterous that his whole strength is exhausted in hitting upon ever newer innovations in the task-- like a plant which runs to seed, so he runs wild in fussy reflections or in unfruitful desires. In a certain sense he expends much time, much industry, much energy, and it is all as if wasted, because the task not established, because there is no master, for he should indeed be his own master. (ED 216-217)

As we saw at the beginning of Chapter IV, when we discussed the leap from the aesthetic to the ethical sphere, Judge William claimed that to choose the despair of the aesthetic sphere was to overcome the despair of the aesthetic sphere. In "The Narrowness is the Way", Kierkegaard makes a similar claim about the leap from the ethical sphere to Religiousness A. The despair of the ethical sphere is the despair of being unable to establish the determinate tasks which define me. To overcome this despair, I need only accept the fact that no determinate task can ever define me. Kierkegaard first expresses this by saying that to be spirit, to be a self, is not a matter of what I do but of how I do it, of the form of my action rather than its content: "...the spiritual fact, how one travels on the way of life, makes the difference and the difference of the way" (ED 211); "...the highway makes no difference; it is the spiritual which makes the difference and the difference of the way". (ED 210)

Kierkegaard then gives a name to the form of action in Religiousness A. He calls it "affliction": "...the task is established: affliction is the way". (ED, 220) And, having

given a name to the form of action in Religiousness A, Kierkegaard claims that this way of acting overcomes the despair of the ethical sphere. Once I see that the content of my task-- what I do-- cannot make any significant difference to me and that the only significant difference is in how I do what I do, I can no longer be in despair of indecision about what to do. I can turn immediately to doing whatever I do in the appropriate manner:

When affliction is the way, then is this the joy: that it is hence IMMEDIATELY clear to the suffer, and that he IMMEDIATELY knows definitely what the task is, so he does not need to use any time, or waste his strength, in reflecting whether the task should not be different. (ED, 214)

The question, of course, is what it means to act in this manner, why Kierkegaard calls acting in this manner "affliction" and why he refers to the person who acts in this manner as a "sufferer". We can begin to answer this question if we turn to the discourse entitled "Man's Need of God Constitutes His Highest Perfection". For the ethical, as we have seen, the tasks which make a difference to me and define me are the tasks which allow me to express the finite qualities which I have chosen to make a difference to me and to define me. When Judge William began to recognize the despair of his position, he tried to save his ethical tasks by claiming that I can never get completely clear about my finite qualities and therefore can never be in the position of having to decide which ones make a difference to me and define me. Religiousness A,

however, refuses to accept Judge William's attempt to cover up his despair:

The failure to discover whatever talents have been entrusted to him, the consequent mission to seek their development to the greatest possible extent in accord with the circumstances of his life...such self-delusion is doubtless seldom encountered. Men rarely fail in this. (ED, 158)

Religiousness A, in other words, does not accept Judge William's arguments about the limits of self-knowledge. Instead, it challenges Judge William's claim that what he calls self-knowledge-- whether it be limited or unlimited-- really is self-knowledge:

The prudential self-knowledge we have just described-- what is its nature? Is it not a knowledge of a man's self in its relation to something else? But it is a knowledge of a man's self in its relation to himself? (ED, 159)

Religiousness A challenges the claim of the ethical to be self-knowledge by challenging the connection which the ethical makes between self-knowledge and self-possession. As we saw in Chapter IV, the ethical makes this connection in the two related meanings it assigns to the word "repentance". In the first instance, repentance involves getting clear about my finite qualities. In the second instance, repentance involves owning up to the qualities I choose to identify as my own and disowning the qualities I choose not to identify as my own. Religiousness A challenges the ethical notion of repentance by challenging the idea that there is a necessary relationship between

self-knowledge and self-possession. Finite qualities are temporal qualities; they can change at any moment. Therefore, I can never possess them securely. For all of Judge William's claims to have established a secure identity-- as lawyer, husband, father and friend-- he could lose the finite conditions which guarantee this identity in an instant. He could lose all of his cases and his clients; his wife could die; his friend could betray him; his son could become a Moonie. The fact that this has not happened does nothing to change the fact that it could happen:

This means that in spite of its seeming trustworthiness such self-knowledge is ultimately a very dubious thing, lacking in any solid foundation, since it concerns only a relation between a doubtful self and a doubtful other. This other could suffer alteration, so that someone else became stronger, richer, more beautiful; and his own self could suffer alteration, so that he became poor, ugly, impotent; and such a change might take place at any instant. If this other, in relation to which he calculates his wealth, is taken away he is deceived. And if it is something that can be taken from him, he is deceived even if it is not actually taken from him, because the entire meaning of his life was based upon a something of this precarious nature. There is no deception when that which can disappoint us does disappoint us, but rather must we say that there is a deception when it does not. (ED, 159)

The ethical, of course, is not without a reply to this challenge. Judge William undoubtedly would respond that, in the event of such losses, he would simply choose a new career, find a new wife and a new friend, have another son, and so on. But this response to the challenge of

Religiousness A is woefully insufficient. For, if Judge William is prepared to claim that he could lose all of his finite qualities and still be the same person, he is really acceding to the claim of Religiousness A that none of his finite qualities really define him. The ethical, in other words, collapses under the weight of yet another contradiction-- on the one hand, it claims that the finite qualities I choose to define me really do define me; on the other hand, it claims that I could lose all of the finite qualities which define me and still remain the same person. The ethical, in other words, wants both to make my identity dependent upon the possession of particular finite qualities and to make me invulnerable to the loss of the qualities which give me my identity. In this conflict between identity and security, something obviously has to give. What gives is the ethic of self-possession and, with it, the claim of the ethical sphere to represent true self-knowledge.

For Religiousness A, in contrast, the recognition that no finite qualities can ever define me is the beginning of true self-knowledge:

Men think it a difficult thing to learn to know oneself, especially when one has many talents and is equipped with a multitude of capacities and dispositions, and must acquire an adequate understanding of all this. The self-knowledge of which we speak is not so complicated; every time a man grasps this brief and pithy truth, that he can of himself do nothing, he understands himself. (ED, 167)

Or,:

Men say indeed that not to know oneself is to be deluded and imperfect; but they often refuse to understand that he who truly knows himself, knows precisely that he can do nothing of himself. (ED, 166)

In claiming that true self-knowledge is the knowledge that none of my finite qualities define me and that the knowledge that none of my finite qualities define me is the knowledge that I can do nothing of myself, Kierkegaard makes the connection between the abandonment of the ethic of self-possession and the how of Religiousness A. The affliction which is the way of Religiousness A is the active attempt to die away from immediacy. Affliction involves the maintenance of a continuous vigilance over myself which seeks to insure that I am not becoming attached to any of my finite qualities in such a way as to allow them to define me and to make me vulnerable to their loss. Indeed, so important is the maintenance of continuous vigilance that I am required to create finite temptations in my mind in order to test my ability to resist them. Since the possibility that I could lose any of my finite qualities-- and not the actuality of having lost any of them-- is of overriding significance here, I can only claim to know myself when I can claim to have overcome my finitude inwardly:

Inwardly he creates in his mind the temptations of glory and fear and despondency, and those of pride and pleasure and defiance, greater than the temptations that meet him outwardly. It is because he thus creates his temptations for himself, that he is engaged in a struggle with himself. If he does not strive in

this manner, then he merely strives with an accidental degree of temptation, and his victory proves nothing with respect to what he could do in a greater temptation. If he conquers the temptation which his environment presents to him, this does not prove that he would conquer if the temptation came in the most terrible form that his mind can conceive. But only when it presents itself to him in this magnitude does he really learn to know himself. In this manner it is present to his inner self; and hence he knows in himself, what he has perhaps failed to learn from the world, that he can do absolutely nothing. (ED, 168-169)

In short, Religiousness A counsels that to accept the despair of the ethical sphere is to overcome the despair of the ethical sphere. Ethical despair derives from the fact that none of my finite qualities can ever define me because all of them are subject to the possibility of change and loss. But to accept this despair is to overcome it, for, if I accept the fact that none of my finite qualities can define me, I am invulnerable to the threats of change and loss:

If he moves immediately to grasp the external it may change in that very instant, leaving him deceived. He may on the other hand accept it, with the consciousness that it is subject to alteration, and he will not be deceived even if it changes... If he proposes to act immediately in relation to outer things, and in this fashion to accomplish something, everything may in an instant come to naught. But if he acts, not immediately but in the light of this consciousness, he will not be deceived even if it all comes to naught... (ED, 164)

But to state the matter in these terms and to leave matters at that is to show what Religiousness A denies-- namely, the claims that immediacy makes a difference to me and defines me-- while failing to show what it affirms.

Once again, a comparison with the leap from the aesthetic to the ethical is instructive here. As we saw in Chapter IV, Judge William not only claimed that to accept the despair of the aesthetic sphere was to overcome the despair of the aesthetic sphere. He also claimed that, by leaping into the ethical sphere, I get the aesthetic-- my immediacy-- back in its relativity. Kierkegaard makes a similar claim about the leap from the ethical to Religiousness A. If I give up all of my claims to my finitude-- all of my claims to impose significance upon it and all of my claims to possess it-- I will get my finitude back in its true, albeit relative, significance.

Kierkegaard develops this claim in the discourse entitled "Every Good and Every Perfect Gift Is From Above".

Kierkegaard takes as his text for this discourse James 1:17: "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning". (ED, 29) He interprets that text as follows:

Is it not true, my hearer, that you interpreted those apostolic words in this manner, and you were not perplexed as to what was a good and perfect gift, or whether it came from God? For, you said, every gift is good when it is received with thanksgiving from the hand of God, and from God comes every good and every perfect gift. You did not anxiously ask what it is which comes from God. You said gladly and confidently: this, for which I thank God. You did not concern your mind with reflections on what constitutes a good and perfect gift: for you said confidently, I know it is that for which I thank God, and therefore I thank him for it. You interpreted the apostolic word; as your heart developed, you did not ask to learn much from life; you wished

to learn only one thing: always to thank God, and thereby learn to understand one thing: that all things serve for good to those that love God. (ED, 41-42)

In other words, once I give up my ethical need to express some particular set of desires, talents and so on through some particular set of social roles, I will be able to appreciate my ability to express whatever talents and desires are called for by whatever situation I happen to find myself in. I do not need to reflect about what my task is. My task is whatever my situation calls for. And I do not need to reflect about what talents and desires to express. I express the talents and desires which my situation calls for. Once I stop obsessively clinging to the notion that some particular talents or some particular roles are of unconditional significance to me, I see that any talent or any role can be of relative significance to me. Kierkegaard expresses this best when he says: "He says nothing in this word about the quality of the particular gifts..." (ED, 39) And: "If a man himself were a good and perfect gift, if he only were receptive and accepted everything from God's hand, how then, indeed, could he receive other than good and perfect gifts?" (ED, 45)

In other words, once I stop trying to make the qualitative distinction between the talents and tasks which are of absolute significance to me and the talents and tasks which are not, I can appreciate the relative significance of every talent and every task. Now, it is important to understand just what Kierkegaard is claiming

here. He is not claiming that if I stop making the distinction between the talents and tasks which matter to me absolutely and those which do not, I will necessarily enjoy whatever talents and tasks are called for by my situation. This is clearly not the case. As the child in the "seeking" stage discovered early on, my situation is just as likely to cause pain as it is to cause pleasure. What Religiousness A claims instead is that, if I stop making absolute qualitative distinctions, I will appreciate the relative significance of each situation, whether it furthers my desires and talents or thwarts them, and I will appreciate it precisely because my identity does not depend upon the satisfaction of my desires and talents. Thus,

And when the easy play of happiness beckoned you, have you thanked God? And when you were so strong that it seemed as if you needed no assistance, have you thanked God? And when your allotted share was small, have you thanked God? And when your allotted share was suffering, have you thanked God? And when your wish was denied you, have you thanked God? And when you must deny yourself your wish, have you thanked God? And when men did you wrong and offended you, have you thanked God? We do not say that the wrong done you by men thereby ceased to be a wrong, for that would be an untrue and foolish speech! Whether it was wrong, you must yourself decide; but have you referred the wrong and the offense to God, and by your thanksgiving received it from Him as a good and perfect gift? Have you done this? Then surely you have worthily interpreted the apostolic word to the honor of God, to your own salvation... (ED, 42-43)

Religiousness A, in other words, must not be confused with a therapeutic technique which helps me to stop compulsively clinging to things in order to help me to

obtain them more easily. Religiousness A is not inner tennis or inner skiing. The equanimity of Religiousness A derives precisely from my not staking my identity to the satisfaction of any particular desire or talent or to the performance of any particular role. This becomes strikingly clear in the discourse entitled "The Expectation of Faith". As we saw above, the ethical sphere collapsed because the finite conditions upon which it based itself were temporal conditions. Thus, no matter how secure it might seem in the present, its security is always illusory. Once I cease making absolute qualitative distinctions, however, I give up any particular hopes I might have for the future. Dependent upon no particular outcome, I am able to withstand all particular outcomes. Thus, I can face the future unafraid:

By what means does he then conquer the changing conditions? Through the eternal. Through the eternal can one conquer the future, because the eternal is the foundation of the future; therefore through this one can understand that. What then is the eternal power in man? It is faith. What is the expectation of faith? Victory, or as the Scriptures have so earnestly and so movingly taught us, it is that all things must work together for good to those that love God. But an expectation of the future which expects victory has indeed conquered the future. The believer is therefore done with the future before he begins on the present; for what one has conquered no longer has power to disturb one, and this victory can only make one more powerful for the present. (ED, 17)

To summarize the conclusions of this section, then, Religiousness A claims that to accept the despair of the ethical sphere of existence is to overcome the despair of

the ethical sphere of existence. The despair of the ethical sphere of existence is the despair of the impossibility of choosing myself absolutely. This despair derives, in turn, from the ethical conviction that finite qualities can be of absolute significance to me and can define me. Once I recognize that this ethical conviction is mistaken, I can express whatever desires and talents my situation calls upon me to express without making the ethical mistake of becoming obsessively attached to them and defining myself in terms of them. Thus, I achieve the equanimity which derives from being open to all situations and attached to none.

In claiming to overcome the despair of the ethical sphere, Religiousness A must, of course, claim to put the factors of the self in the right relation. We have already seen how it claims to establish the right relationship between the infinite and finite and the eternal and temporal factors. As we saw in our discussion of "Every Good and Every Perfect Gift Is From Above", every finite desire and talent and every social role is of relative significance precisely because none of them are of absolute or infinite significance. In Religiousness A, I have the unconditional or absolute in my life precisely insofar as I do not confuse it with the conditional and relative. And, conversely, finite qualities have significance for me precisely insofar as I recognize their finitude and do not try to give them a kind of unconditional weight which they

cannot bear. Similarly, I have the eternal in my life insofar as my involvement in my activities is not conditioned by the expectation of any particular temporal outcome. As Kierkegaard says, I expect Victory, not victories. And when I expect no particular temporal outcome, I have the temporal in my life inasmuch as I am able to appreciate each moment for what it is. Thus, Religiousness A claims to overcome the despair of the ethical by putting the factors of the self together in the right relation.

2

We have just seen how Religiousness A claims to establish the distinctions between infinite and finite and the eternal and the temporal. But Religiousness A makes another, equally important, claim as well. As we saw in Chapter IV, the ethical sphere not only claimed to establish qualitative distinctions. It also claimed to establish them ethically insofar as the qualitative distinctions it established were egalitarian. Now, as we have seen, the ethical failed to make good on its claim to be egalitarian. In order to avoid facing up to the despair of his position, Judge William required the existence of classes of people such as women and the working class who could not choose themselves. Religiousness A recognizes the inherent inequalities of the ethical sphere and claims to overcome them. In "The Expectation of an Eternal Happiness", Kierkegaard spells out his claim that only Religiousness A is truly egalitarian.

As we saw above, Judge William had absolute confidence in his ability to determine who was ethical and who was not. His confidence was rooted in his conviction that he knew the conditions for realizing the ethical. I know that I am being ethical when I can say what finite qualities are

of infinite significance to me. I can say what finite qualities are of infinite significance to me when I have chosen them to be of infinite significance to me. As Judge William said, I can always say what my duty is. And while I cannot say what another's duty is, I can know whether he can say what his duty is.

Religiousness A, in contrast, offers no such certainty about the conditions for its realization. Since I can never know that I have done it successfully, I can never be in the position of judging whether another person has done it successfully:

...the one who is truly concerned understands very well that there must be a condition, but finitely he will never be able to fathom this; for the concern prevents a finite understanding. Even when he has considered it most intensively, he must still confess that from a finite standpoint he cannot decide what the conditions are; for it is precisely the finite which the anxiety takes from him. In everything he finds out there will always be a residuum of uncertainty, and this uncertainty nourishes the concern, and the concern nourishes the uncertainty. This uncertainty may be expressed in this way-- that he expects eternal happiness by the grace of God. But, again, he expects God's grace, not by virtue of some finite condition; for then it is not grace, and then, too, the concern will soon transform itself into earthly confidence. If he is now constantly concerned in this way, but also constantly saved through grace; if he constantly perceives that it would be a distressing sign if the concern should cease, how could he ever get enough vain assurance to decide this question for another? (ED, 129-130)

We can understand Kierkegaard's claim that there are no finite conditions for being in Religiousness A and that I therefore can never know whether I have satisfied these

conditions or not if we recall that being in Religiousness A means dying away from immediacy. Dying away from immediacy means refusing to bestow infinite significance on anything finite. Dying away from immediacy completely would therefore mean that my being a self would not be conditional upon the expression of any particular finite talent, the assumption of any particular finite role, and so on. But I can never simply die away from immediacy once and for all. The moment I have conquered one temptation, another temptation presents itself. Therefore, I can never have absolute assurance that I have satisfied the conditions of Religiousness A. And since I cannot know whether I have satisfied them, I cannot presume to judge whether anyone else has satisfied them.

Now, as we saw above, when Judge William began to become aware of the despair of his position, he radically reversed himself on the issue of whether I can know that I have satisfied the finite conditions of the ethical sphere. In his revised version of the ethical, Judge William claimed that the finite qualities which are of absolute significance to me are the ones I can never get clear about. Now, as we saw above, this reversal on the part of Judge William destroyed the ethical in the process of trying to save it, for it made the activity of the ethical individual completely heteronomous. The uncertainty which necessarily accompanies Religiousness A, according to Kierkegaard, accomplishes just the opposite.

Rather than undermining Religiousness A, it is necessary to its success. If I ever became certain that I had satisfied the conditions of Religiousness A, I would be certain that I had not satisfied them, for I would have based my certainty upon a finite condition. But since there is no finite condition, I can never be sure about myself and I can never exclude anyone else:

Still, suppose, too, that there were certain conditions which one could accurately state in words, and by means of which the observant thought might test what the condition of the individual was, how could he, if he was again concerned (and if he were not, then everything would be vanity), how could he ever with finite certainty decide whether these conditions were present within him? These conditions being then acts, definite conceptions, moods, who knows himself so intimately that on his own responsibility he would dare to vouch that these conditions were present in himself just as they ought to be, not bastard children of doubtful parentage! Who could do this if he were truly concerned, and who must not be truly concerned if he would consider the question seriously! But if an uncertainty constantly remains behind in his soul, on account of which he must take refuge in grace, how could it then occur to him to wish to decide this question for others? For before one begins on others, one must first be absolutely certain himself. But whoever through grace is absolutely certain, something we indeed wish for the individual, he is, humanly speaking, absolutely uncertain. (ED, 130-131)

Thus, Religiousness A is truly egalitarian. Since I can never say with certainty that I have died away from immediacy completely, I am equal to everyone else in an equality of striving:

...if God held in His right hand eternal happiness, and in His left also the concern which had become your life's content, would not you yourself choose the left, even if you still

became like one who chose the right? There must still be an equality, and what is indeed more disheartening than the equality of death, which makes all equally poor; and what is more blessed than the equality which makes all equally happy? (ED, 134-135)

We witnessed some of the concrete ethical implications of Judge William's universalism when we examined his discussions of such concrete commitments as work, marriage and friendship. We can understand some of the concrete ethical implication of the egalitarianism of Religiousness A if we turn away from the Edifying Discourses for a moment in order to examine Kierkegaard's major work devoted to the ethics of Religiousness A, Works of Love.

Chapter II of Part One of Works of Love is an analysis of the concept of love of neighbor. In section B of that chapter, Kierkegaard challenges the claim of the ethical sphere to be egalitarian. Despite its ostensible commitment to equality, Kierkegaard says, the ethical fosters relationships which are partial and, to that extent, unequal. Thus, for example, Judge William's relationships to his wife and to his friend are partial because they are based upon, respectively, his wife's particular kind of ethical immediacy and his friend's ethical life-view and they therefore exclude those who do not share that kind of immediacy or that life-view. But insofar as they exclude others on the basis of these kinds of differences, they are not truly spiritual-- i.e., they are not based upon a true understanding of the self:

In erotic love and friendship the two love

one another in virtue of differences or in virtue of likenesses which are grounded in differences (as when two friends love one another on the basis of likeness in customs, character, occupation, education, etc., consequently on the basis of the likeness by which they are different from other men or in which they are like each other as different from other men). In this way the two can selfishly become one self. Neither one of them has yet the spiritual qualifications of a self; neither has yet learned to love himself Christianly. In erotic love the I is qualified as body-psyche-spirit. In friendship the I is qualified as psyche-spirit and the friend is qualified as psyche-spirit. Only in love to one's neighbor is the self, which loves, spiritually qualified simply as spirit and his neighbor as purely spiritual. (WL, 69)

Love of neighbor, in contrast, does not make distinctions. It is not based upon differences or likenesses which exclude others. Rather it loves everyone equally:

Love to one's neighbor is therefore eternal equality in loving, but this eternal equality is the opposite of exclusive love or preference. This needs no elaborate development. Equality is just this, not to make distinctions, and eternal equality is absolutely not to make the slightest distinction, is unqualifiedly not to make the slightest distinction. Exclusive love or preference, on the other hand, means to make distinctions, passionate distinctions, unqualifiedly to make distinctions. (WL, 70)

And, in loving everyone equally, it recognizes that everyone is a neighbor:

Your neighbor is every man, for on the basis of distinctions he is not your neighbor, nor on the basis of likeness to you as being different from other men. He is your neighbor on the basis of equality with you before God; but this equality absolutely every man has, and he has it absolutely. (WL, 72)

The ethical, in other words, insofar as it was based

upon finite conditions, made distinctions between objects of love and was therefore exclusive. Religiousness A, insofar as it is not based upon finite conditions, makes no distinctions between objects of love and therefore loves everyone equally.

Now, it is important to recognize the complexity of Kierkegaard's attitude towards distinctions in this discussion. Religiousness A does not claim that distinctions between people do not exist. It does not deny the existence of distinctions of wealth, of education, of status, of life-view, and so on. What it denies, rather, is that these differences should make any difference in the way we treat people. Just as we must continually resist the temptation to bestow any overriding significance on our own talents, desires, roles, and so on, so must we continually resist the temptation to bestow any overriding significance-- positive or negative-- on the finite qualities which distinguish others:

Just as the Christian does not and cannot live without the body, so he cannot live without the distinctions of earthly life which belong to each individual, whether by virtue of birth, position, circumstance, education, etc..... These must continue as long as time continues and must continue to tempt every man who enters into the world, for by being a Christian he does not become free from distinctions, but by winning the victory over the temptation of distinctions he becomes a Christian. (WL, 81)

Now, with this commitment to equality through resistance to the temptation of distinctions, Religiousness A sets itself off quite distinctly from the two attempts to

institute social equality which we have described so far-- the attempts, namely, of the present age and of the ethical sphere of existence. The present age, as we saw, attempts to institute equality through the levelling of all differences. The ethical, in contrast, attempts to institute equality through giving all differences equal significance. Religiousness A points up to the illusory nature of both of these attempts. We will never arrive at a situation in which wealth, education, status, and so forth are distributed absolutely equally. We will never arrive, in other words, at a pure present age. The equality of Religiousness A does not depend upon any such outcome:

Earthly likeness, if it was possible, is not Christian equality. And perfect achievement of earthly likeness is an impossibility. Well-meaning worldliness really confesses this itself. It rejoices when it succeeds in making temporal conditions similar for more and more, but it recognizes that its struggle is a pious wish, that it has taken on an enormous task, that its prospects are remote-- if it rightly understood itself it would perceive that its vision will never be achieved in time, that even if this struggle were continued for millennia it would never attain its goal. (WL, 82)

But we will also never arrive at a situation in which differences of wealth, education, status, and so forth are taken to be insignificant so long as we take the individual's expression of his finite qualities through social roles to be of absolute significance. If finite qualities are important, differences among finite qualities cannot be unimportant. Religiousness A, then, does not

attempt to do away with worldly distinctions or to make worldly distinctions equal but to strive to overcome the concern with worldly distinctions all together. Thus,:

Christianity, on the other hand, aided by the short-cut of the eternal, is immediately at the goal: it allows all distinctions to stand, but it teaches the equality of the eternal. It teaches that everyone shall lift himself above earthly distinctions. Notice carefully how equably it speaks. It does not say that it is the poor who shall lift themselves above earthly distinctions, while the mighty should perhaps come down from their elevation-- ah, no, such talk is not equable, and the likeness which is obtained by the mighty climbing down and the poor climbing up is not Christian equality; this is worldly likeness. No, if one stands at the top, even if one is the king, he shall lift himself above the distinction of his high position, and the beggar shall lift himself above the distinction of his poverty. Christianity lets all the distinctions of earthly existence stand, but in the command of love, in loving one's neighbor, this equality of lifting oneself above the distinctions of earthly existence is implicit. (WL, 82-83)

In short,

He, then, who will love his neighbor...does not concern himself about eliminating this or that distinction or about mundanely eliminating all distinctions but concerns himself devoutly with permeating his distinction with the sanctifying thought of Christian equality... (WL, 83)

With this analysis of Religiousness A's understanding of the meaning of equality, we have laid out all of the basic claims of the sphere. In steadfastly refusing to grant special significance to any particular talent or role or to any particular person, I am released from the ethical despair of being unable to decide what talents, roles or

people are of infinite significance to me and I am able to appreciate the significance of each situation and each person equally. My life thus has a quality of equanimity which it lacked in the present age, the aesthetic and the ethical. Indeed, from the perspective of Religiousness A, the similarities between the present age, the aesthetic and the ethical far outweigh their differences. It is important to note, in this regard, that in the works on Religiousness A, Kierkegaard never singles out the present age, the aesthetic or the ethical for particular mention. Instead, he lumps all three together under the general heading of "worldliness". Having concluded our description of Religiousness A, we can see why this is so. The present age, the aesthetic and the ethical all take distinctions seriously. The present age perceives them as a threat and attempts to level them; the aesthetic and the ethical, each in their different ways, attempt to establish them. Only Religiousness A claims to be indifferent to them.

But is it really possible to live one's life in complete indifference to distinctions? Is Religiousness A correct in holding that-- contrary to Anti-Climacus' description of the self-- the problem for human beings is not having the factors of the self in the right relation from the hand of God but being self-annihilated before God? In order to take up these questions, we must turn to the edifying discourse entitled "The Glory of Our Common Humanity". In this discourse, more than in any of the

others, we can begin to recognize some of the contradictions of Religiousness A.

3

In "The Glory of Our Common Humanity", Kierkegaard says that people in the present age, the aesthetic and the ethical are not individuals because the differences which distinguish them are the relative differences of talent, education, wealth, status, and so on, rather than an unconditional or absolute difference:

...the one who is willing to reconcile himself to disappearing and perishing in the insignificant service of the comparisons: he regards himself as an animal, whether in the comparative sense he was distinguished or humble. The individual animal is not singled out, is not unconditionally a separate entity, the individual animal is a number, and belongs under what the most celebrated pagan thinker has called the animal classification: the herd. Therefore God singled out the human, made every man into this separate entity which is implied in the absoluteness of those first principles. And the human being who turns away in despair from those first principles to plunge into the herd of the comparisons makes himself into a number, he regards himself as an animal, whether in a comparative sense he becomes the distinguished or the humble. (ED, 239)

I only become an individual when I stop defining myself in terms of the relative distinctions of the present age, the aesthetic and the ethical and define myself, instead, in terms of my absolute relationship to God. My relationship to the absolute cannot be a relative relationship-- I cannot be more or less like the absolute.

I am either absolutely like or absolutely unlike God. But to resemble God absolutely is not to resemble him directly:

Man and God do not resemble each other directly, but conversely: only when God has infinitely become the eternal and omnipresent object of worship, and man always a worshipper do they then resemble one another. (ED, 243)

As we can infer from our previous description of the relationship between infinite and finite and the eternal and the temporal in Religiousness A, to make God the infinite and eternal object of worship is precisely to refuse to identify God with anything finite and temporal. It is to refuse to make any finite and temporal commitment absolute in my life. Kierkegaard indicates this in his discourse "The Unchangeableness of God" when he says:

...for God there is nothing significant and nothing insignificant...in a certain sense the significant is for Him insignificant, and in another sense even the least significant is for Him infinitely significant. (ED, 260)

In this passage, we can see why Kierkegaard continually refers to Religiousness A as "self-annihilation before God". To be like God is, for Religiousness A, to refuse to make any finite commitment absolute in my life. From the perspective of the absolute, all finite commitments are relative commitments. But if all finite commitments are relative in relation to God who is absolute, all finite commitments are of absolutely equal significance because all finite commitments are of equally relative significance. All finite commitments are

levelled. But if all finite commitments are levelled-- if I do not have the distinction between infinite and finite-- I cannot be a self. Kierkegaard more than confirms this when he says: "It is glorious to be arrayed like the lily; it is even more glorious to be the ruler who stands erect; but it is most glorious to be nothing through the act of worship". (ED, 243)

Like its definition of the relationship between infinite and finite, Religiousness A's definition of the relationship between the eternal and the temporal also represents a kind of self-annihilation before God. To be like God is, for Religiousness A, to see everything temporal as relative in relation to God who is eternal. But if everything temporal is relative in relation to God who is eternal, the temporal outcome of action cannot make any difference to God-- or, by extension, to me. Kierkegaard as much as admits this when he says in "The Unchangeableness of God" that to be absolutely unconcerned about the outcome of action-- in this case, about the fact that evil triumphs while good suffers-- is really to believe that God does not exist. For if the outcome of action makes no difference to God, the existence of God can make no difference in my action:

True enough, if your will, if my will, if the will of all these many thousands happens to be not so entirely in harmony with God's will: things nevertheless take their course as best they may in the hurly-burly of the so-called actual world; it is as if God did not pay much attention. It is rather as if a just man-- if there were such a man!-- contemplating this

world, a world which, as the Scriptures say, is dominated by evil, must needs feel disheartened because God does not seem to make Himself felt. But do you believe on that account that God has undergone any change? Or is the fact that God does not seem to make Himself felt any the less a terrifying fact, as long as it is nevertheless certain that He is eternally unchangeable? To me it does not seem so. Consider the matter, and then tell me which is the more terrible to contemplate: the picture of one who is infinitely the stronger, who grows tired of letting himself be mocked, and rises in his might to crush the refractory spirits-- a sight terrible indeed, and so represented when we say that God is not mocked, pointing to the times when His annihilating punishments were visited upon the human race-- but is this really the most terrifying sight? Is not this other sight still more terrifying: one infinitely powerful, who-- eternally unchanged!-- sits quite still and sees everything, without altering a feature, almost as if He did not exist; while all the time, as the just man must needs complain, lies achieve success and win to power, violence and wrong gain the victory, to such an extent as even to tempt a better man to think that if he hopes to accomplish anything for the good he must in part use the same means; so that it is as if God were being mocked, God the infinitely powerful, the eternally unchangeable, who none the less is neither mocked nor changed-- is not this the most terrifying sight? For why, do you think, is he so quiet? Because He knows with Himself that he is eternally unchangeable. Anyone not eternally sure of Himself could not keep so still, but would rise in His strength. Only one who is eternally immutable can be in this manner so still. (ED, 258)

Religiousness A, in other words, is self-annihilation before God because it defines the factors of the synthesis in such a way that they negate rather than reinforce each other. To have the infinite and eternal is precisely not to have the finite and temporal. Thus, Religiousness A is despair:

There is thus sheer fear and trembling in this thought of the unchangeableness of God,

almost as if it were far, far beyond the power of any human being to sustain a relationship to such an unchangeable power; aye, as if this thought must drive a man to such unrest and anxiety of mind as to bring him to the verge of despair. (ED, 262)

But if Religiousness A is despair-- if to be in Religiousness A is to be nothing-- it is not surprising that, almost as soon as Kierkegaard states that it is "most glorious to be nothing through the act of worship", he begins to qualify his statement. Like A and Judge William before him, he begins to turn the despair of his position into the salvation of his position. He does so, significantly, in the same terms Judge William employed when he began to become aware of the despair of his position-- namely, in terms of the inescapability of the concern for daily bread. Thus, while the lilies of the field are clothed and the birds of the air are fed without ever having to be concerned about clothing and food, human beings are not in this position. They cannot help but be concerned about the "necessities of life":

...it is perfection to be able to have a care for the necessities of life-- in order to overcome this fear, in order to let faith and confidence drive out fear, so that one is in truth without a care for the necessities of life in the unconcern of faith. (ED, 245)

Indeed, to be without this concern-- without anxiety-- would be to cease to be human, for it would be to cease to

be conscious: "...how does the possibility of an anxiety about subsistence come about? From the fact that the temporal and the eternal touch one another in consciousness, or rather from the fact that the human has consciousness". (ED, 245)

As A and Judge William claim in regard to their respective spheres, in other words, Kierkegaard claims that no one can absolutely satisfy the requirements of Religiousness A. No one can be absolutely indifferent to the finite and temporal. For to be absolutely indifferent to the finite and temporal is to cease to be conscious, to cease to be a self.

But this attempt to save his position, like A and Judge William's attempts to save their positions, destroys Kierkegaard's position, for it leaves me with two equally unsatisfactory alternatives: either I have finite and temporal commitments and I do not have a relationship to the absolute, or I have a relationship to the absolute and have no finite and temporal commitments. Either I have the relative commitments of the present age, in which case I am not a self, or I have an absolute relationship to God, in which case I am not a self.

Religiousness A, in other words, wants to maintain the self while abolishing the distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal which constitute the self. In this respect, it parallels the last stage of the aesthetic sphere,

represented by "The Unhappiest Man". But while the unhappiest man attempted to make his lack of a self an object of reflection and thus to annihilate himself by turning himself into a pure, detached observer of himself and the world, Religiousness A proposes that the annihilation of the self results in a particular kind of involvement in the world; indeed, that action is only meaningful and free once the self has been annihilated. In the claim that there can be meaningful action without a self lies the contradiction of Religiousness A.

But if meaningful action requires the existence of the qualitative distinctions which constitute the self, what is the source of these distinctions? Kierkegaard, of course, does not answer this question in any of the works written under his own name. As we have seen, the despair of Religiousness A surfaces in "The Unchangeableness of God" but Kierkegaard makes no attempt to counter this despair. Indeed, Kierkegaard specifically forecloses the one possibility which, according to Anti-Climacus, could save him from his despair. In "The Unchangeableness of God", Kierkegaard says:

In the world of events He is present everywhere in every moment; in a truer sense than we can say of the most watchful human justice that it is present everywhere, God is omnipresent, though never seen by any mortal; present everywhere, in the least event as well as

in the greatest, in that which can scarcely be called an event and in that which is the only event, in the death of a sparrow and in the birth of the Saviour of mankind. (ED, 256)

For Anti-Climacus, as we shall see, the birth of the savior of mankind is hardly of equal significance to the death of a sparrow. Rather, it is an event whose significance is qualitatively different from that of any other event. Religiousness A, however, has its own understanding of the significance of Christ. Before turning to Anti-Climacus' attempt to answer the despair of Religiousness A, it is important to say a few words about the significance of Christ in Religiousness A. For, as we shall see, Religiousness A is not without influence in modern theology. Paradoxically, the very extent of its influence in modern Christian thought may contribute to the fact that, as we shall see, the most rigorous and the most popular versions of Religiousness A no longer claim to be Christian at all.

In "The Glory of Our Common Humanity", Kierkegaard takes Christ as the symbol of Religiousness A. Christ does what no other human being can do-- he exists fully in Religiousness A and does so without anxiety. Thus,

The bird that is without subsistence cares, is then the symbol of the human, and yet the human, through being able to have these cares, is far more perfect than the symbol. Therefore the human never dares forget that the One who referred him to the bird of the air, as to a primary, a childish instruction, that precisely he in earnestness and truth is the real symbol, the true, essential human symbol of perfection. For when it is said, 'The birds of the air have nests and foxes have holes, but the Son of man has not where to lay his head,' then there is mentioned a condition which is far more helpless than that of a bird, and is also itself conscious of this. But then, with the consciousness of this, to be without anxiety: aye, this is the exalted image of creation, this is man's divine pattern. (ED, 247-248)

Kierkegaard spells out this view of Christ in much more detail in the discourse entitled "Christ as the Pattern"-- a discourse which, significantly, takes as its text the same passage about the lilies and the birds which Kierkegaard took for "The Glory of Our Common Humanity". In this essay, Kierkegaard sees Christ as the perfect representative of Religiousness A insofar as Christ had no overriding attachments to anything finite and temporal-- he

had no family (FSE, 172), no country (FSE, 175), no possessions (FSE, 176); indeed, he did not even have an overriding commitment to his own disciples. (FSE, 181) Instead, he turned away from all worldly attachments in order to serve only one master. Thus,

He is absolutely an alien in the world, without the least connexion with anything or with any single person in the world, where everything else is in connexion. It is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle; but it is impossible for that man to serve only one master who has even the least connecting bond. (FSE, 180)

But if this is the significance of Christ for Religiousness A, we can see why Kierkegaard says that God cares as much about the death of a sparrow as he does about the birth of the savior of mankind. For the human existence of the savior of mankind can really make no difference to Religiousness A. To be human, as we have seen, means inescapably to be concerned about the finite and temporal. But this is precisely the concern which the Christ of Religiousness A does not have. Insofar as he does not have it, he is not an existing human being at all but, at best, a kind of fictional creation.

But with this description of the significance-- or insignificance-- of Christ for Religiousness A, we begin to see that Religiousness A has played a not insignificant role in modern theology. Indeed, so pervasive is its influence that even some who claim to oppose it get swept up by the view they claim to oppose. Perhaps the

best-known proponent of Religiousness A in modern theology is H. Richard Niebuhr in his book Christ and Culture. Niebuhr argues that the central ethical task of Christians is to make a distinction between the absolute and the relative. God is absolute; all human values, institutions, etc., are relative. But as John Howard Yoder has characterized Niebuhr's position in The Politics of Jesus:

Jesus was a radical monotheist. He pointed men away from the local and finite values to which they had been giving their attention and proclaimed the sovereignty of the only One worthy of being worshipped. The impact of this radical discontinuity between God and men, between the world of God and human values, is to relativize all human values. The will of God cannot be identified with any one ethical answer, or any given human values, since these are all finite. But the practical import of that relativizing, for the substance of ethics, is that these values have become autonomous. For all that now stands above them is the infinite. (Yoder, 18)

Now, as Yoder points out, Niebuhr himself tries to correct this problem by making the order of creation and church tradition as significant as the figure of Christ for Christian ethics. Indeed, Niebuhr criticizes Kierkegaard in his chapter entitled "Concluding Unscientific Postscript" precisely for ignoring creation and the church and thus making Christianity too individualistic. But, as Yoder points out, in promoting the significance of creation and the church, Niebuhr loses the significance of Christ:

It is quite evident that, caught between the universality and the validity of the orders of creation on the one hand and the historical continuity and present relevance of the accumulation of Christian tradition on the other, whatever substantial originality there may have

been in the ethic of Jesus is no longer of determining significance. If it still enjoys some kind of symbolic centrality, the gem is nevertheless almost lost within the size of the setting. (Yoder, 104)

And yet, when we see what Christ means for Yoder, it is difficult to see how his position differs substantially from that of Niebuhr. Once again, Christ is the person who lives fully within the structures of the world without being of them. His literal death is the result of the threat which this symbolic dying away from the powers of the world poses to the powers of the world. Thus, to imitate Christ is to die away from worldly distinctions. Like Kierkegaard in Works of Love, Yoder claims that worldly distinctions can never be completely eliminated. Indeed, if they were completely eliminated, we would cease to be human beings. But if we cannot eliminate worldly distinctions, we can transform them from within. Following Paul's method in the New Testament of transforming traditional Stoic ethics by, for example, preserving the roles of master and slave but giving new obligations to the master and new dignity to the slave, Yoder wants to transform our current worldly distinctions by preserving, for example, the different roles of men and women but according equal dignity to each.

The problem with Yoder's position, of course, from Kierkegaard's perspective-- or, rather, from the perspective of Anti-Climacus, to whose works we will turn momentarily-- is that Yoder's Christianity finally has no

more place for Christ than does Niebuhr's. Once again, Christ symbolizes dying away from worldly distinctions but Christ is not the source of any alternative distinctions. Insofar as we live in this world, the distinctions which govern our lives are worldly distinctions. Christ can show us that these distinctions are not absolute, but insofar as we are human, we must have distinctions and therefore, insofar as we are human, our lives are governed by the world and not by Christ. In the establishing of the distinctions which, Yoder argues, are essential to human existence, Christ is of no assistance.

The fact that Christ finally plays no central role in either of these supposedly Christian positions may help to explain why secularized variants of these positions seem to play a much more decisive role in modern culture than do religious ones. Indeed, perhaps the most thoroughgoing defense of Religiousness A outside of Kierkegaard's own work comes from a source which is neither Christian nor even explicitly religious. In Division II of Being and Time, Martin Heidegger explains and defends his concept of "authenticity". The authentic individual has two primary defining characteristics-- in the first place, he recognizes that all of the roles and goals available to him have been established by the Anyone (for our present purposes, the functional equivalent of the present age) and that, insofar as this is true, they cannot differentiate him in any way, since anyone can perform his role and have

his goals. Furthermore, he recognizes, in anxiety, that he is absolutely different from all of these roles and goals and that none of them can ever define him. As temporality temporalizing itself, he is a pure nothing which cannot be defined by any of the roles and goals of the Anyone.

Second, however, while lucidly aware of his own nothingness and while constantly holding onto anxiety, the authentic individual takes over the roles and goals of the Anyone. Unlike the inauthentic person (for our present purposes equivalent to the aesthetic and ethical spheres), he does not believe that these roles and goals differentiate or define him in any way. Thus, he is able to perform them with a kind of flexibility and equanimity which inauthentic people lack. He can stick with his roles and goals so long as it is appropriate to do so but he can also abandon them without loss in order to respond to a unique situation. Thus, though his position differs from theirs in many of its concrete details, Heidegger, like Niebuhr and Yoder, counsels a policy of remaining in the world but never of it.

Despite the many similarities between Heideggerian authenticity and Religiousness A, the concerns which motivate Heidegger at this stage of his work are very different from those which motivate Kierkegaard. To cite only one example, Heidegger's concern with the issue of what Kierkegaard calls "qualitative distinctions" does not surface until well after Being and Time, in the essay

entitled "The Origin of the Work of Art". Thus, it would take us too far afield to examine the specific contradictions in the notion of authenticity. We invoked this notion, instead, in order to show that, despite its use of Christian language (language which the ethical also employs for its own purposes), Religiousness A is not necessarily a Christian or even a religious position. The existence of contemporary secular therapeutic movements such as erhard seminars training, which promotes a very Heideggerian position, only serves to reinforce this claim.

But when we combine our earlier argument that Religiousness A cannot succeed in its goal of establishing human action while annihilating qualitative distinctions with our current argument that Religiousness A is not Christian because Christ is not the source of qualitative distinctions, we are in a position to begin to appreciate that peculiarly Christian form of religiousness which Kierkegaard calls Religiousness B. As should be evident by now, the central claim of Religiousness B is that Christ is the source of the distinctions between infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal. To Anti-Climacus' peculiar defense of that claim we now turn.

CHAPTER VI:
RELIGIOUSNESS B

As we noted at the end of the last chapter, Anti-Climacus, the pseudonym who writes from the perspective of Religiousness B, claims that Religiousness A closes off the one possibility for overcoming despair--namely, taking Jesus Christ as the paradigm for having infinite and finite, possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal in the right relation and putting the factors of the self in the right relation by imitating him. As Anti-Climacus says in Training In Christianity:

Christ's life here upon earth is the paradigm; it is in likeness to it that I along with every Christian must strive to construct my life...(TC 109)

The questions which confront us in this final chapter, then, are, what reasons does Anti-Climacus give for taking Jesus Christ as the paradigm for having the factors of the self in the right relation and how does he show that the factors are, indeed, in the right relation when an individual imitates Christ?

When we consider the two works by Anti-Climacus--Training In Christianity and The Sickness Unto Death--however, we discover that Anti-Climacus answers neither of

these questions. Instead, he devotes his considerable energies to the attempt to convince us that they cannot be answered. Indeed, Anti-Climacus' message seems to be that we will only understand the significance of Christ and the meaning of having the factors of the self in the right relation when we understand that we cannot understand them. Thus, as we shall see below, in Training In Christianity, Anti-Climacus argues that we cannot understand the significance of Christ while in The Sickness Unto Death he argues that we cannot understand what it means to have the factors of the self in the right relation.

Needless to say, this stance on the part of Anti-Climacus seems to put a definite strain on our attempt to complete the line of argument which we have developed through all of the preceding chapters. According to that line of argument, this chapter should describe Religiousness B and the justifications for its claims to solve the problem of the present age and put the factors of the self in the right relation while avoiding the contradictions of the aesthetic, ethical and Religiousness A spheres of existence. But if we cannot describe Religiousness B or provide reasons for its acceptance, it seems impossible to pursue this line of argument any further.

In this chapter, we will try to show that it is not impossible to pursue this line of argument any further--

that, indeed, we can make some kind of case for the claims of Religiousness B to solve the problem of the present age and to put the factors of the self in the right relation while avoiding the contradictions of the lower spheres. But, true to the peculiar nature of this sphere, the case we make will be of a peculiar type. It will be, to invoke the concept which most definitively differentiates Religiousness B from all of the other spheres of existence, "indirect".

We have already had recourse to the notion of indirect discourse, of course, in the preceding chapters. As we argued in Chapter III and demonstrated in Chapters III, IV and V, each of the characters who writes from the perspective of one of the lower spheres of existence is engaged in an attempt to cover up the contradictions of his sphere. Thus, we can never take the statements of any of these characters directly-- i.e., at face value-- for the very statements which a character uses to defend his position may, in fact, undermine it. Anti-Climacus describes this kind of indirect discourse when he says in Training In Christianity:

This art consists in reducing oneself, the communicator, to nobody, something purely objective, and then incessantly composing qualitative opposites into unity....An example of such indirect communication is....to bring defence and attack together in such a unity that no one can say directly whether one is attacking or defending, so that both the most zealous partisans of the cause and its bitterest enemies can regard one as an ally--and with this to be nobody, an absentee, an objective something, not a personal man. (TC 132-133)

But, Anti-Climacus goes on to argue, there is a second type of indirect discourse or indirect communication. In the first type, talk serves as a way of covering up the fact that the person doing the talking cannot exist in the sphere he is describing. While I can describe the lower spheres of existence, I cannot exist in them because, as we have seen, each of them defines the factors of the synthesis in such a way that they negate rather than reinforce each other. Talk thus serves the purpose of covering up the contradictions of each of the lower spheres and allowing me to continue in my illusion that I am existing in them. In Religiousness B, however, indirect communication has the opposite meaning. An individual can exist in Religiousness B but we cannot describe Religiousness B:

All communication which has regard to 'existence' requires a communicator--in other words, the communication is the reduplication of that which is communicated; to reduplicate is to 'exist' in what one understands. But the mere fact that there is a communicator who himself exists in that which he communicates does not suffice to characterize such communication as indirect communication. If, however, the communicator himself is dialectically qualified, and his own essential being requires reflective definition, all direct communication is impossible. (TC 133-134)

A person in one of the lower spheres, in other words, could directly describe his sphere. If he did so, however, he would immediately recognize its contradictions. But an individual in Religiousness B who is "dialectically qualified"--i.e., who has defined the factors in such a way

that they reinforce rather than negate each other-- cannot describe his having the factors in the right relation.

Such is the case for the individual in Religiousness B par excellence, the individual who defines what it is to be in Religiousness B, Jesus Christ, the God-man:

Such is the case with the God-man. He is a sign, the sign of contradiction, and so all direct communication is impossible. For if the communication by a communicator is to be direct, it does not suffice that the communication itself is direct, but the communicator himself must be directly qualified. If not, then even the most direct communication of such a communicator becomes, by reason of the communicator, i.e. by reason of what the communicator is, non-direct communication. (TC 134)

Training In Christianity

Anti-Climacus devotes Section B of Part II of Training In Christianity to the attempt to provide Scriptural support for his claim that, since we cannot describe Religiousness B, we cannot prove that Jesus Christ was in Religiousness B and, therefore, we cannot prove that Jesus Christ defines what it is to be in Religiousness B. The title of Part II is "Blessed Is He Whosoever Is Not Offended in Me: A Biblical Exposition and Christian Definition of Concepts". The concept which Anti-Climacus seeks to define is the concept of the "offense"-- that which repels people from Christianity. There are two basic forms of the offense. The second, to which we shall turn later on in this chapter, is what might be called the offense to immediacy. It is a response to the claim of Christianity to be absolute and to its demand that an individual take all of his immediate desires, talents, and so on as relative to it and as potential objects of sacrifice. The first form of the offense is what might be called the offense to reflection. It is a response to Christianity's claim that it cannot be rationally

understood or proven. In Section B, Anti-Climacus describes this offense as "the possibility of the essential offense which has to do with exaltation, for the fact that an individual man speaks or acts as though he were God, says of himself that he is God, having to do therefore with the qualification of God by the composite term God-man". (TC 96)

The offense, in other words, has to do with the fact that an individual claims to be God. As Anti-Climacus explores the sources of this offense in the New Testament, he notes that it is completely justified. There is absolutely nothing directly recognizable about the man Jesus which justifies our taking him as God. Thus, in Section B, #1, Anti-Climacus argues that the New Testament thoroughly undermines all of the traditional proofs that Jesus was God which Christendom has claimed to find there. Thus, for example, when John the Baptist asks from prison if Jesus is the one who is to come or if they should wait for another, Jesus says,

'Go and tell John the things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.'

(TC 96)

Anti-Climacus says,

Christ's reply comprises in contento all that commonly goes by the name of 'proofs for the truth of Christianity', with exception only of the proof from prophecy. But John himself, being a representative of this last category, must have

been able, if anybody was, to establish in the firmest possible way by the proofs from prophecy the assurance that Christ was the Expected One. Yet it is remarkable that the last of the Prophets, the Forerunner, who must have stood in the nearest possible rapport with prophecy, is not brought nearer by these proofs than to the point of becoming attentive-- and asking the question. With the exception then of the proof from prophecy, all the remaining proofs for the truth of Christianity are comprised in Christ's reply. He points to the miracles (the lame walk, the blind see, &c.) and to the doctrine itself (the gospel is preached to the poor)-- and thereupon, strangely enough, He adds, 'Blessed is he whosoever is not offended in me'. (TC 97)

What Christendom has taken as proof that Jesus is God, in other words, only serves to bring people to the point of deciding whether he is or not. As Anti-Climacus argues in the case of miracles, I will only believe that what Jesus does is a miracle if I already believe that he is God. Otherwise, I will simply discount the "miracle" as an inexplicable happening:

You see something inexplicable, miraculous (and that is all), he himself says that it is a miracle-- and with your own eyes you behold the individual man. The miracle can prove nothing; for if you do not believe he is what he says he is, you deny the miracle. A miracle can make one attentive--now thou art in a state of tension, and all depends upon what thou dost choose, offence or faith. (TC 99)

Thus, in summarizing his argument about proofs,

Anti-Climacus says:

...'Blessed is he whosoever is not offended in me'. That is, he makes it evident that in relation to Him there can be no question of any proofs, that a man does not come to Him by the help of proofs, that there is no direct transition to this thing of becoming a Christian, that at the most the proofs might serve to make a man attentive, so that once he has become

attentive he may arrive at the point of deciding whether he will believe or be offended. (TC 98)

But, as Anti-Climacus' remark that there is no direct transition to becoming a Christian intimates, the argument about proofs is not the most important argument of this section of Training In Christianity. Rather, it sets the stage for the most important argument of this section. If there are no proofs that Jesus is God, this is, finally, because Jesus is not directly different from anyone else. There is nothing immediately noticeable about him which sets him apart from other people. If there were, he would not need to use miracles to get people to notice him. If we step back from two thousand years of the mythologizing of Christendom and put ourselves in a position of contemporaneousness with Christ, "...we must begin with not knowing who He is, that is to say, in the situation of contemporaneousness with an individual man, who is like other men, in whom there is nothing directly to be seen". (TC 99)

In Section B #2 Anti-Climacus reinforces his claim that the offence arises in the situation of contemporaneousness with Christ. Anti-Climacus cites John 6:61:

Christ says of Himself that he is the living bread, 'whosoever eateth this bread shall live'. The Jews then strove among themselves and said, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat'. Therefore Jesus said to them, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you....Even many of his disciples when they heard this said, This is a hard speech, who can bear

him [sic]? Then Jesus, who knew in Himself that His disciples murmured over this, said to them, 'Doth this offend you?' And from the following verse (verse 66) it appears that from that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with Him. (TC 100-101)

After dismissing such doctrines as "the ubiquity of Christ's body" as fantastic notions which deny the very possibility of the offense which the passage in question so clearly raises, Anti-Climacus reiterates his point that, in the situation of contemporaneousness, there is no way of avoiding the offense because there is nothing directly different about Jesus:

But in reality, in truth, i.e. in the situation of contemporaneousness with that individual man, whose origin one knows all about, whom one recognizes on the street, &c.--would it occur to anybody to deny that here the possibility of the offence can be avoided only in one way, by believing? But he who believes must, in order to attain faith, have passed through the possibility of the offence. (TC 102)

Such are Anti-Climacus' Biblical supports for the claim that there can be no proofs that Jesus is God because Jesus is not directly different from anyone else. Several questions arise from this discussion. First, what does it mean to say that Jesus is not directly different from other men-- and, by extension, that, insofar as he is qualitatively different from other men--i.e., is God-- this difference must be an indirect difference? What is an indirect difference and why must Jesus Christ be indirectly different in order to be God? Second, what is the significance of believing that he is indirectly different

from other men, that he is God?

Anti-Climacus supplies the Biblical answers to these questions in the Supplement to Section B. As we shall see also in Section C, where Anti-Climacus discusses the offense to immediacy, the first part of each discussion of each offense has to do with the offense provoked by the God-man himself while the Supplements to each discussion have to do with the offense provoked by the implications for the self of believing in the God-man. In the Supplement to Section B, Anti-Climacus says that the two passages discussed above are the only ones where the offense of an individual's claiming to be God is mentioned expressly. However, "With every word suggestive of the qualification God, with every act that bears this suggestion, the possibility of the offence is presented. (TC 103-104)

But, having made the point that "the possibility of offence...is present every instant"(TC 103), Anti-Climacus cites the story of the paralytic in Matthew 9:4 and says:

Thus in Matt. 9:4 (the story of the paralytic), when Jesus says to the Pharisees, 'Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts,' these evil thoughts were the offence. To forgive sinners is in the most decisive sense a qualification suggestive of God. But (to repeat it once again) when a man has only a fantastic picture of Christ, he perhaps finds nothing strange in His forgiving sins, and fails to notice the possibility of the offence. On the other hand, in reality, in truth, in the situation of contemporaneity-- an individual man like others-- that he should assume to forgive sins! There is but one way to avoid the offence, viz. by believing; but he who believes has passed through the offence. (TC 103)

The crucial phrase in this passage is the sentence, "To forgive sinners is in the most decisive sense a qualification suggestive of God". With this assertion, we are in a position to be able to begin to make the connection between the indirect recognizability of the God-man and his significance for the self. In order to do so, however, we must turn to Anti-Climacus' other work, The Sickness Unto Death.

The Sickness Unto Death

As we stated above, The Sickness Unto Death is a book about all of the wrong ways of putting the factors of the self together, about despair. The book has two parts. In the first part of Part First, Anti-Climacus discusses general aspects of despair which we have discussed in previous chapters--despair as the disrelationship between the factors of the self (II), why the possibility of despair is higher than the actuality of despair and why despair is the sickness unto death. In the second part, Anti-Climacus shows why despair is universal. In the third part, Anti-Climacus discusses the forms of despair, first in terms of the factors and then in terms of the forms of consciousness or spheres of existence. The discussion of despair in terms of the forms of consciousness continues through a discussion of the despair of the ethical sphere of existence. At this point, Anti-Climacus abruptly terminates the discussion and begins the second part of the book. The title of Part Second is, significantly, "Despair is Sin". Anti-Climacus, in introducing this part, says:

Sin is this: before God, or with the conception of God, to be in despair at not willing to be oneself, or in despair at willing to be oneself. Thus sin is potentiated weakness or potentiated defiance: sin is the potentiation of despair. The point upon which the emphasis rests is before God, or the fact that the conception of God is involved; the factor which dialectically, ethically, religiously, makes "qualified" despair (to use a juridical term) synonymous with sin is the conception of God. (SUD 208)

Anti-Climacus explains this in the section entitled "Gradations in the Consciousness of the Self(The Qualification 'before God')":

The gradations in the consciousness of the self with which we have hitherto been employed are within the definition of the human self, or the self whose measure is man. But this self acquires a new quality or qualification in the fact that it is the self directly in the sight of God. (SUD 210)

If the only way to have the factors of the self in the right relation, in other words, is to have a relationship with God, then if I do not have the factors of the self in the right relation I am violating the will of God and I am in sin. If I do have the factors in the right relation, on the other hand, I am in faith, for, as Anti-Climacus, invoking Romans, says, "the opposite of sin is faith". "Faith is: that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself is grounded transparently in God." (SUD 213)

Indeed, with this initial description of what faith is, we are in a position to complete Anti-Climacus' description of the self which we began in Chapter II. In

Chapter II, we discussed Anti-Climacus' definition of human beings as self-defining subjects. But we did not complete the definition. As Anti-Climacus makes clear, I only become a self when I have a relationship to God:

Such a relation which relates itself to its own self (that is to say, a self) must either have constituted itself or have been constituted by another.

If this relation which relates itself to its own self is constituted by another, the relation doubtless is the third term, but this relation (the third term) is in turn a relation relating itself to that which constituted the whole relation.

Such a derived, constituted, relation is the human self, a relation which relates itself to its own self, and in relating itself to its own self relates itself to another. (SUD 146-147)

Indeed, with this completion of the definition, we can see why Anti-Climacus mentions two kinds of despair-- not willing to be oneself and willing to be oneself-- as sin in the passage we quoted above. As Anti-Climacus says in his definition of the self:

Hence it is that there can be two forms of despair properly so called. If the human self had constituted itself, there could be a question only of one form, that of not willing to be one's own self, of willing to get rid of oneself, but there would be no question of despairingly willing to be oneself. This formula is the expression for the total dependence of the relation (the self namely), the expression for the fact that the self cannot of itself attain and remain in equilibrium and rest by itself, but only by relating itself to that Power which constituted the whole relation. Indeed, so far is it from being true that this second form of despair (despair at willing to be one's own self) denotes only a particular kind of despair, that

on the contrary all despair can in the last analysis be reduced to this....The disrelationship of despair is not a simple disrelationship but a disrelationship in a relation which relates itself to its own self and is constituted by another, so that the disrelationship in that self-relation reflects itself infinitely in the relation to the Power which constituted it. (SUD 147)

Thus,

This then is the formula which describes the condition of the self when despair is completely eradicated: by relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it. (SUD 147)

In claiming that Christ forgives sins, then, Anti-Climacus is claiming that Christ is the paradigm for having the factors of the self in the right relation. In claiming that this claim is offensive, Anti-Climacus is claiming that the notion that an individual person can be a paradigm for being a self is offensive to reason. But there is another offense, as well-- namely, that being an individual is itself an offense to reason. In Section II of Part Second of The Sickness Unto Death, Anti-Climacus makes it clear why this is the case. In his continuation of his discussion of despair, or sin, under the forms of consciousness Anti-Climacus discusses what he calls "The Sin of Despairing of the Forgiveness of Sins (Offense)". (SUD 244) Clearly, this form of despair is a response to the failure of Religiousness A and to the recognition that a solution to the despair of Religiousness A is being offered. This becomes clear when we follow the chronology

of Anti-Climacus' discussion. After discussing ethical despair at the end of the first part, the next kind of despair which Anti-Climacus discusses at the beginning of the second part is what he calls "The Sin of Despairing Over One's Sin". (SUD 240) This is clearly the despair of Religiousness A, for it involves the conscious unwillingness to hear anything about salvation. Having recognized that his position is despair, an individual decides to remain in this despair. Thus,

It is an attempt to impart to sin as a positive power firmness and interest, by the fact that now it is eternally decided that one will hear nothing about repentance, nothing about grace. Nevertheless despair over sin is conscious of its own emptiness, conscious of the fact that it has nothing whatever to live on, not even a lofty conception of one's own self. (SUD 241)

The person in the despair of Religiousness A, in other words, believes both that he cannot annihilate himself and that he cannot save himself. At this point, he is confronted with the claim that he can be saved through faith in Christ:

The potentiation in consciousness of the self is in this instance knowledge of Christ, being a self face to face with Christ....As was said in the foregoing, 'the more conception of God, the more self,' so here it is true that the more conception of Christ, the more self. A self is qualitatively what its measure is. That Christ is the measure is on God's part attested as the expression for the immense reality a self possesses; for it is true for the first time in Christ that God is man's goal and measure, or

measure and goal. (SUD 244-245)

This claim, however, is offensive. It is offensive not only because, as we saw in the last section, an individual claims to be able to forgive sins. It is also offensive because it claims that sin can be forgiven. Thus,

The sin of despairing of the forgiveness of sins is offense....It requires a singularly high degree of dullness (that is to say, the sort ordinarily found in Christendom) in case a man is not a believer (and if he is, then he believes that Christ is God) not to be offended at the fact that a man would forgive sins. And in the next place it requires an equally singular degree of dullness not to be offended at the assertion that sin can be forgiven. (SUD 247)

Anti-Climacus makes it clear why the claim that sin can be forgiven is offensive. If sin means refusing to become an individual, then forgiveness means becoming an individual. But we cannot rationally comprehend what it means to become an individual:

The category of sin is the category of the individual. Speculatively sin cannot be thought at all. The individual man is subsumed under the concept; one cannot think an individual man but only the concept man....But as one cannot think an individual man, so neither can one think an individual sinner. (SUD 250)

Sin, in other words, is the qualitative difference between God and man. We cannot save ourselves because we cannot know what it means to be an individual:

The doctrine of sin, the doctrine that we are sinners, thou and I, which absolutely disperses the 'crowd', fixes then the qualitative distinction between God and man more deeply than ever it was fixed anywhere...In no respect is a man so different from God as in the fact that he is a sinner, as every man is, and is a sinner 'before God', whereby indeed the opposites are held together in a double sense: they are held together, not allowed to separate from one another; but by being thus held together the differences display themselves all the more strikingly....As a sinner man is separated from God by a yawning qualitative abyss. And obviously God is separated from man by the same yawning qualitative abyss when he forgives sins....Here then lies the utmost concentration of the offense, which precisely that doctrine has found necessary which teaches the likeness between God and man. (SUD 252-253)

In the last two sections, then, we have set forth Anti-Climacus' documentation for his claim that Religiousness B is an offense to rationality. According to Anti-Climacus, Religiousness B is an offense to rationality both because it claims that an individual can forgive sin and because it claims that sin can be forgiven.. The question which now confronts us is, what is Religiousness B? Is it possible to say anything about it without rationalizing the non-rationalizable? Fortunately, Anti-Climacus himself provides us with the transition which allows us to answer this question in the affirmative. In The Sickness Unto Death, Anti-Climacus says:

But offense is the most decisive determinant of subjectivity, of the individual man, the most decisive it is possible to think of. Doubtless to think of offense without thinking the offended man is not so impossible as to think of the music of the flute without thinking the flute-player;

but after all even thought must admit that offense even more than love is an unreal concept which only becomes real when there is an individual who is offended. (SUD 253)

According to Anti-Climacus, offense is not an abstract concept but a concrete reality which comes into existence when a particular individual is offended. Similarly, love is not an abstract concept but a concrete reality which comes into existence when a particular individual is in love. Anti-Climacus' comparison between offense and love is not fortuitous. As we are now in a position to see, romantic love provides the closest analogy to Religiousness B and carries with it a kind of offense which is the closest analogy to the offense of Religiousness B. Since we cannot describe Religiousness B itself, our only access to it is through a description of romantic love with attention to the differences between romantic love and faith. For this description, however, we must leave the works of Anti-Climacus and turn to the work of a pseudonym who is himself offended, Johannes de Silentio in Fear and Trembling.

Fear and Trembling: "Preliminary Expectoration"

In the introduction to Part Second of The Sickness Unto Death, Anti-Climacus describes "...as the most dialectical borderline between despair and sin, what one might call a poet-existence in the direction of the religious, an existence which has something in common with the despair of resignation only that the conception of God is involved". (SUD 208) This is Johannes de Silentio's despair, which he contrasts with the faith of the Knight of Faith in the "Preliminary Expectoration" of Fear and Trembling.

The "Preliminary Expectoration" falls into three parts. The first part, which is a discussion of the story of Abraham and Isaac, uses Abraham as an example of a Knight of Faith. We will not discuss this part of the "Preliminary Expectoration" in this section but will discuss it, instead, when we discuss de Silentio's concept of the teleological suspension of the ethical in Problems I, II, and III of Fear and Trembling. When we understand the role which the story of Abraham and Isaac plays in de Silentio's exposition of the concept of the teleological

suspension of the ethical, we will be in the proper position to understand the fundamentally different role which it plays in the "Preliminary Expectoration".

The second part of the "Preliminary Expectoration", on the other hand, is directly relevant to the issues which have concerned us in this chapter up to this point. De Silentio raises the question of what it looks like to be a Knight of Faith and provides an answer which, given our discussion in the last two sections, should not at all surprise us: "I candidly admit that in my practice I have not found any reliable example of the knight of faith, though I would not therefore deny that every second man may be such an example". (FT 49) If there is nothing directly different about the God-man, and, by extension, about the individual who imitates him, it goes without saying that it will be impossible to find an example of such an individual. It is this inability to find an example which leads de Silentio to look for an analogy and this analogy is romantic love.

De Silentio makes it clear from the beginning that romantic love is only an analogy for faith, an analogy which is easier to understand than faith itself because understanding it does not require making any "preliminary observations". (FT 52) We will see what these "preliminary observations" are in the next two sections when we see how romantic love is different from Religiousness B. Here, however, we are concerned with the similarities between

romantic love and Religiousness B.

As we stated above, romantic love is like Religiousness B because, like Religiousness B, it is an offense to reason. According to de Silentio, we can see most clearly why it is an offense to reason if we consider a case in which a love cannot be realized:

But since the prodigy is so likely to be delusive, I will describe the movements in a definite instance which will serve to illustrate their relation to reality, for upon this everything turns. A young swain falls in love with a princess, and the whole content of his life consists in this love, and yet the situation is such that it is impossible for it to be realized, impossible for it to be translated from ideality into reality. (FT 52)

As de Silentio immediately makes clear, the impossibility to which he is referring here is an unconditional impossibility, not a conditional impossibility. Therefore, I have to have spirit --to be in a sphere of existence--even to be able to recognize this impossibility as an impossibility: "People believe very little in spirit, and yet making this movement depends upon spirit, it depends upon whether this is or is not a one-sided result of a dira necessitas, and if this is present, the more dubious it always is whether the movement is normal. (FT 56)

To recognize the impossibility, in other words, is to recognize that the love is unrealizable in principle. And to recognize that the love is unrealizable in principle is

to recognize that a finite person cannot have infinite significance. This is why present age spiritlessness never gets to the point of recognizing the impossibility. For the present age, the idea that a particular person could make an unconditional difference to me is inconceivable, both because all particular people are the same and no particular person can therefore make any particular difference to me and because there are no unconditional differences:

The slaves of paltriness, the frogs in life's swamp, will naturally cry out, 'Such a love is foolishness. The rich brewer's widow is a match fully as good and respectable'. Let them croak in the swamp undisturbed. It is not so with the knight of infinite resignation, he does not give up his love, not for all the glory of the world. (FT 52)

But what does it mean to say that a finite person cannot have infinite significance for me, that this ideal cannot be realized? De Silentio takes up this question at some length in the "Preliminary Expectoration". A particular person can change or move away or die. But if a particular person has absolute significance for me and he changes or moves away or dies, this means that I have lost that which had absolute significance for me. Thus, that which appeared to be unconditional is, in fact, conditional. Thus, we are faced with irreconcilable alternatives: either the significance in my life comes from a finite person, in which case it is not infinite or the

significance in my life is infinite, in which case it does not come from a finite person. It is impossible that a finite person could have infinite significance for me.

In romantic love, in other words, the definition of the infinite and finite factors is a rational contradiction. It should not surprise us, then, that the definition of the possibility and necessity factors is similarly contradictory. If I am in love with a particular person, he is necessary to me in the sense that he defines me--I am the lover of John. On the other hand, it is always possible that I could have fallen in love with someone else. It is a matter of chance that I happened to meet this particular person at this particular time and so on. But this situation is contradictory. How can I allow another person to become necessary to me when I know that it is always possible that I could have fallen in love with someone else? How can I allow my identity to be defined by a relationship that could have been different? We seem to be confronted with two irreconcilable alternatives: either I allow myself to be defined by another person-- and open myself to the possibility of losing my identity if I lose him--because I know that I could not possibly have a relationship with anyone else or I know that a number of possible relationships are open to me and I therefore refuse to commit myself to a relationship in such a way that I allow it to define me. But the idea that I could allow myself to be defined by a particular person and, at

the same time, remain completely conscious that a number of possible relationships are open to me is a rational contradiction.

It goes without saying that the contradiction in the definition of the eternal and the temporal factors in romantic love parallels the contradictions in the definitions of infinite and finite and possibility and necessity. Romantic love is temporal insofar as it involves a discontinuity between present, past and future. When I fall in love with someone, I gain the distinction between present and past. My present is defined by the presence of this relationship while my past is defined by its absence. At the same time, I gain the distinction between present and future. While the present is defined by the presence of this relationship, the future is defined by the issue of whether or not this relationship will continue. It is always an open question whether a present relationship will have a future and it is, in some sense, up to the individuals involved to determine whether it will or will not.

But while romantic love is temporal, it is also eternal. Romantic love is eternal insofar as it involves continuity between present, past and future. When I fall in love with someone, I see my whole past as having led inevitably to this relationship--the relationship is the fulfillment of my desires, it provides what was missing in my previous relationships, and so on. At the same time, I

see my whole future as inevitably following from this relationship--from here on out, my desires will be fulfilled, I will have what was missing in my previous relationships, and so on.

But this relationship between the temporal and the eternal in romantic love contains a contradiction. On the one hand, the fact that this relationship came into existence at a particular point in time means that it could end at a particular point in time. My commitment to maintaining the relationship involves an acknowledgement that the relationship will not simply maintain itself by itself. On the other hand, I am committed to maintaining this relationship in a way that I was not committed to maintaining previous relationships precisely because the continuation of this relationship seems guaranteed. Again, we seem to be confronted with irreconcilable alternatives: either I am recreating the relationship from moment to moment and the eternal aspect of the relationship is an illusion or the continuation of the relationship is guaranteed and the idea that I am recreating it from moment to moment is an illusion. But there is no way of rationally resolving the contradiction that maintaining the relationship is up to the individuals involved and that it is not up to the individuals involved.

Having described the contradictions in the definitions of the factors of the synthesis in romantic love, we are now in a position to understand de Silentio's contrast

between Knights of Resignation and Knights of Faith. The Knight of Resignation recognizes all of the contradictions which we have just described. Because he cannot live with these contradictions, however, he attempts to rationalize them. He knows that romantic love cannot be translated from ideality to reality. Therefore, he attempts to translate it from reality to ideality. We can see this quite clearly when we turn to de Silentio's description of the Knight of Resignation's definition of the factors of the synthesis.

De Silentio describes the Knight of Resignation's definition of the relationship between infinite and finite as follows:

From the instant he made the movement the princess is lost to him...he has no need of the intervention of the finite for the further growth of his love. He has no need of those erotic tinglings in the nerves at the sight of the beloved etc.... He no longer takes a finite interest in what the princess is doing, and precisely this is proof that he has made the movement infinitely.(FT 55)

The Knight of Resignation, in other words, recognizes the tremendous risk involved in allowing a finite person to have infinite significance for him. Therefore, he gives up his relationship with the princess. But he does not give it up completely. While he gives up his relationship with the real princess, he retains his relationship to the ideal princess:

So the knight makes the movement--but what movement? Will he forget the whole thing?....No! For the knight does not contradict himself, and it is a contradiction to forget the whole content of one's life and yet remain the same man. To become another man he feels no inclination, nor does he by any means regard this as greatness. Only the lower natures forget themselves and become something new....The deeper natures never forget themselves and never become anything else than what they were. So the knight remembers everything, but precisely this remembrance is pain, and yet by the infinite resignation he is reconciled with existence. (FT 54)

The Knight of Resignation, in other words, gives up the real princess but retains the ideal princess. He lives with her in memory and thus overcomes the contradiction of allowing a finite person to have infinite significance. He does not have to live with the anxiety that the princess might change or move away or die. Instead, he has unconditional equanimity because nothing that the real princess does can disturb his idealized memory of her.

The Knight of Resignation's rationalization of the contradiction in romantic love's definition of possibility and necessity parallels his rationalization of the contradiction in romantic love's definition of infinite and finite. As de Silentio says:

Fools and young men prate about everything being possible for a man. That, however, is a great error. Spiritually speaking, everything is possible, but in the world of the finite there is much which is not possible. This impossible, however, the knight makes possible by expressing it spiritually, but he expresses it spiritually by waiving his claim to it. (FT 54)

As we saw above, the contradiction in romantic love's definition of possibility and necessity is the contradiction that my identity is determined by a relationship which could be different. The Knight of Resignation rationalizes this contradiction by refusing to allow a relationship to the real princess to give him his identity. In his imagination, he can create as many possible relationships to the princess as he wants. Thus, he has the best of both worlds. On the one hand, his identity is determined by his relationship to a particular person; on the other hand, he is completely self-determining. As de Silentio says: "He has comprehended the deep secret that also in loving another person one must be sufficient unto oneself". (FT 55)

De Silentio describes the Knight of Resignation's rationalization of romantic love's definition of the relationship between the eternal and the temporal as follows: "Love for that princess became for him the expression for an eternal love, assumed a religious character, was transfigured into a love for the Eternal Being, which did to be sure deny him the fulfillment of his love, yet reconciled him again by the eternal consciousness of its validity in the form of eternity, which no reality can take from him". (FT 54)

As we saw above, the contradiction in romantic love's definition of the relationship between the eternal and the temporal had to do with the fact that, on the one hand, a

relationship which begins at a particular point in time can end at a particular point in time, and, on the other hand, that a relationship which appears to the participants to have been predestined from eternity can have no beginning and no end. The Knight of Resignation rationalizes this contradiction by eternalizing his relationship with the princess. Because his relationship with her is an ideal relationship in memory, it cannot change, even if the real princess does change. Thus, the Knight of Resignation reconciles himself with temporality by withdrawing into eternity.

Having shown how the Knight of Resignation rationalizes the contradictions of romantic love and thus makes himself invulnerable to its risks, we are now in a position to contrast the Knight of Resignation with the Knight of Faith. Before doing so, however, it is important to note that de Silentio's attitude towards the Knight of Resignation is not at all censorious. The absence of censoriousness on the part of de Silentio is not only due to the fact that de Silentio is, by his own admission, a Knight of Resignation. It is also due to the fact that the Knight of Resignation has recognized a fundamental truth. As a sentence we quoted above states, "He has comprehended the deep secret that also in loving another person one must be sufficient unto oneself". (FT 55) The failure of the Knight of Resignation is that, having recognized his self-sufficiency, he installs himself in it permanently.

The success of the Knight of Faith is that, having recognized that he is sufficient unto himself, he commits himself to a relationship with a finite person and accepts all of the attendant risks. In order to commit himself to such a relationship, however, the Knight of Faith must make what de Silentio calls the "movements of resignation". He must recognize the truth of the position of the Knight of Resignation at the same time that he refuses to install himself in this position. Thus, "The infinite resignation is the last stage prior to faith, so that one who has not made this movement has not faith; for only in the infinite resignation do I become clear to myself with respect to my eternal validity, and only then can there be any question of grasping existence by virtue of faith". (FT 57)

The movements of resignation, then, must precede the movements of faith. Having described the former movements, we are now in a position to describe the latter ones. As we said above, the Knight of Faith recognizes the contradictions of romantic love but, unlike the Knight of Resignation, he accepts them and does not attempt to rationalize them. Thus, the relationship between infinite and finite and possibility and necessity is fundamentally different for the Knight of Faith than it is for the Knight of Resignation. As de Silentio says:

Now we will let the knight of faith appear in the role just described. He makes exactly the same movements as the other knight, infinitely renounces claim to the love which is the content

of his life, he is reconciled in pain; but then occurs the prodigy, he makes still another movement more wonderful than all, for he says, 'I believe nevertheless that I shall get her, in virtue, that is, of the absurd, in virtue of the fact that with God all things are possible'. The absurd is not one of the factors which can be discriminated within the proper compass of the understanding: it is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen. At the moment when the knight made the act of resignation, he was convinced, humanly speaking, of the impossibility. This was the result reached by the understanding, and he had sufficient energy to think it. On the other hand, in an infinite sense it was possible, namely, by renouncing it; but this sort of possessing is at the same time a relinquishing, and yet there is no absurdity in this for the understanding, for the understanding continued to be in the right affirming that in the world of the finite where it holds sway this was and remained an impossibility. This is quite as clear to the knight of faith, so the only thing that can save him is the absurd, and this he grasps by faith. So he recognizes the impossibility, and that very instant he believes the absurd; for, if without recognizing the impossibility with all the passion of his soul and with all his heart, he should wish to imagine that he has faith, he deceives himself, and his testimony has no bearing, since he has not even reached the infinite resignation. (FT 57-58)

The Knight of Faith, in other words, recognizes the rational contradictions involved in allowing a finite person to have infinite significance for him and in allowing a relationship which could have been different to give him his identity. But, recognizing these contradictions, he commits himself to a relationship with a real lover instead of an ideal one. Similarly, the Knight of Faith recognizes the rational contradictions involved in allowing a relationship which began at a particular point in time and which could end at a particular point in time

to be the salvation of his past disappointments and the fulfillment of his future aspirations. But, recognizing this contradiction, he commits himself to a temporal relationship and not simply to an eternal one. Thus,

A purely human courage is required to renounce the whole of the temporal to gain the eternal; but this I gain, and to all eternity I cannot renounce it-- that is a self-contradiction. But a paradoxical and humble courage is required to grasp the whole of the temporal by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith. (FT 59)

Having described the differences in the relationships between the factors for the Knight of Resignation and the Knight of Faith, then, de Silentio summarizes the difference between the two positions as follows:

It is about the temporal , the finite, everything turns in this case. I am able by my own strength to renounce everything and then to find peace and repose in pain....But by my own strength I am not able to get the least of the things which belong to finiteness, for I am constantly using my strength to renounce everything. By my own strength I am able to give up the princess, and I shall not become a grumbler, but shall find joy and repose in my pain; but by my own strength I am not able to get her again, for I am employing all my strength to be resigned. But by faith, says that marvellous knight, by faith I shall get her in virtue of the absurd. (FT 60)

The contradictions of romantic love and the risks which are attendant upon these contradictions cannot be undone. Therefore, there are only two alternatives: either I rationalize the contradictions in resignation or I accept

the contradictions in faith.

With this summary, we have essentially completed our discussion of the "Preliminary Expectoration". We began this discussion with Johannes de Silentio's admission that he was unable to find an example of a Knight of Faith and with his subsequent claim that, in the absence of an example of faith, romantic love can serve as an analogy. How, then, is romantic love an analogy for faith? As we have seen in this section, romantic love, like faith, is an offense to reason. It is an offense to reason because it involves allowing a finite person to have infinite significance; because it involves allowing a relationship which could have been different to provide an identity; and because it involves allowing a temporal relationship to be eternal. If faith is analogous to romantic love, then, it must be an offense to reason for analogous reasons. It must involve allowing a finite commitment to have infinite significance; allowing a commitment which could have been different to give me my identity; and allowing a temporal commitment to be eternal. But if a commitment in Religiousness B is not the commitment of romantic love, what kind of commitment is it? And why, unlike romantic love, does it involve belief in the God-man? In order to answer these questions, we must temporarily reverse our direction. Having seen how romantic love is similar to Religiousness B, we must now see how it is different from Religiousness B. In order to do so, we must turn first to

Judge William's discussion of romantic love in the first essay in the second volume of Either/Or, "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage". In that essay, Judge William argues that romantic love is inadequate as a way of defining the factors of the synthesis. Only after we have understood the inadequacies of romantic love will we be in a position to understand the adequacy of Religiousness B.

Before turning to Judge William's discussion, however, it is in order to cite Johannes de Silentio's concluding comparison of faith and resignation for it is one of the most moving passages in all of Kierkegaard's writings:

Thus to get the princess, to live with her joyfully and happily day in and day out (for it is also conceivable that the knight of resignation might get the princess, but that his soul had discerned the impossibility of their future happiness), thus to live joyfully and happily every instant by virtue of the absurd, every instant to see the sword hanging over the head of the beloved, and yet not to find repose in the pain of resignation, but joy by virtue of the absurd-- this is marvellous. He who does it is great, the only great man. (FT 61)

"The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage"

In the preceding section, we saw that romantic love is like Religiousness B insofar as its definition of the factors of the synthesis is an offense to reason. However, we did not see how romantic love is different from Religiousness B. In "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage", Judge William provides his own account of how romantic love defines the factors of the synthesis and demonstrates the inadequacies of this definition as a definition of the self. Only when we see how romantic love provides an inadequate definition of the factors will we be in a position to see how Religiousness B provides an adequate definition. Therefore, before turning our attention once again to Religiousness B, we must turn to Judge William's discussion of romantic love.

In his essay, Judge William shows how romantic love defines each of the three sets of factors. Judge William describes the definition of infinite and finite in romantic love as follows: "It is directed towards a single, definite and actual object, which alone has existence for it, everything else being nonexistent". (E/O II, 43) For

romantic love, in other words, a finite person has infinite significance-- so much so, in fact, that it is as if no one else and nothing else in the world exists.

Judge William's description of the definition of possibility and necessity in romantic love parallels his description of the definition of infinite and finite.

Judge William says:

This first love contains a factor of sensuousness and beauty, yet it is not merely sensuous. The sensuous factor as such comes to evidence only through reflection, but first love lacks reflection and is therefore not simply sensuous. This gives the character of necessity to first love. (E/O II, 43)

But since the essence of all love is characterized as a unity of freedom and necessity, so it is in this case. Precisely in the necessity the individual feels himself free, is sensible in this of his whole individual energy, precisely in this he senses the possession of all that he is. (E/O II, 44)

It is the unity of freedom and necessity. The individual feels drawn to the other individual by an irresistible power, but precisely in this is sensible of his freedom. (E/O II, 46)

Romantic love involves necessity, in other words, insofar as I am irresistibly attracted to another person. It involves freedom, on the other hand, insofar as my attraction to another person is, in some sense, up to me. Judge William's discussion of the role which sensuousness plays in romantic love helps to illuminate what he means here. When Judge William says that first love lacks reflection and is therefore not simply sensuous, he means that I do not fall in love with someone by reflecting upon

the physical attributes which I find attractive and finding a person who has these attributes. Even in those instances in which I do happen to fall in love with a person who has the attributes which I know that I find attractive, I cannot help but feel that my love for that person is not the result of his possessing these attributes but is the result, rather, of some attraction which is not conscious, which is not under my control and which, to that extent, is necessary.

When Judge William says that "precisely in the necessity the individual feels himself free...precisely in this he senses the possession of all that he is", however, he calls attention to the opposite side of romantic love. Even though I cannot fall in love by reflecting upon the attributes which I find attractive and finding someone who has them, it is also the case that, once I do fall in love with someone, I recognize that my love is not simply fortuitous, that I possessed standards of attractiveness all along, which I now recognize for the first time because my lover now exemplifies them for me. Thus, my falling in love with this person was not simply a matter of fate. I do have standards of attractiveness and thus it is, in some sense, up to me whether I do or do not fall in love with a particular person. By falling in love with a particular person, I become more conscious of these standards and, to that extent, more self-possessed.

In short, romantic love defines the relationship

between possibility and necessity as follows: insofar as I am in love with a particular person, he defines what it is to be attractive, sensitive, and so on. I cannot choose to be in love with someone else because I cannot define the qualities which I find attractive apart from the person who exemplifies them for me. In this sense, the person with whom I am in love is necessary to me. At the same time, insofar as the person with whom I am in love makes explicit those qualities which I have implicitly found attractive all along, I recognize that I could have fallen in love with someone else. In that sense, my falling in love with a particular person is always up to me and is not a matter of strict necessity in the sense of determinism.

Finally, Judge William describes the relationship between the temporal and the eternal in romantic love as follows:

In spite of the fact that this love is essentially based upon the sensuous, it is noble, nevertheless, by reason of the consciousness of eternity which it embodies; for what distinguishes all love from lust is the fact that it bears an impress of eternity. (E/O II, 21)

For the sensual is the momentary. The sensual seeks instant satisfaction, and the more refined it is, the better it knows how to make the instant of enjoyment a little eternity. The true eternity in love, as in true morality, delivers it, therefore, first out of the sensual. (E/O II, 22)

The lovers are sincerely convinced that their relationship is in itself a complete whole which never can be altered. (E/O II, 21)

Like everything eternal it has the double propensity of presupposing itself back into all eternity and forward into all eternity. (E/O II, 43)

As we saw in the last section, romantic love comes into existence at a particular moment in time and yet it carries with it the conviction that it has existed and that it will exist forever. For Judge William, this paradox is due to the fact that, while romantic love satisfies my immediate desires, romantic love is not simply immediate. My commitment to my lover is not conditional upon his satisfying my desires at every moment because our relationship is not simply in the moment but presupposes itself back into the past and forward into the future.

Such is Judge William's description of the definition of the factors of the synthesis in romantic love. The question which now confronts us is, why is this definition inadequate? Why can't I become a self by falling in love with another person?

Judge William's answer to these questions is, of course, an answer from the perspective of the ethical sphere and not from the perspective of Religiousness B. As the placing of his essay at the beginning of the second volume of Either/Or makes evident, Judge William believes that a person can fall in love before he has ethically chosen himself. One of the major arguments of the essay, however, is that, once a person has fallen in love, ethical choice becomes absolutely imperative. Thus, Judge William's argument about the inadequacies of romantic love as a definition of the self is simultaneously an argument about the adequacy of the ethical sphere. Since we have

already demonstrated the contradictions of the ethical sphere, our concern in this section is with Judge William's criticism of romantic love and not with his defense of the ethical sphere.

Judge William describes the inadequacy in the definition of infinite and finite in romantic love as follows:

...the defect of earthly love is the same thing as its advantageous quality, i.e., its partiality. Spiritual love has no partiality and moves in the opposite direction, constantly abhorring all relativities. Earthly love in its true form takes the opposite path, and at its highest it is love only for one single person in the whole world....Earthly love begins by loving several-- these are the preliminary anticipations-- and it ends by loving one. Spiritual love is constantly opening itself more and more, ever extending its circle of love to include more and more persons until it reaches its true expression in loving all. So then marriage is sensuous but at the same time spiritual...absolute in itself and at the same time inwardly pointing beyond itself. (E/O II, 63)

As we have already seen, both Johannes de Silentio and Judge William argue that, in romantic love, a finite person has infinite significance for me. Thus, romantic love seems to define infinite and finite in such a way that they reinforce rather than negate each other. However, as Judge William argues in the passage quoted above, there is a problem in the definition of infinite and finite in romantic love. While a particular person has unconditional significance for me, no one else and nothing else has any

particular significance for me. Insofar as this is the case, romantic love involves a kind of self-annihilation. I lose my own capacity to be a self, my own capacity to have distinctions between what matters to me and what does not, in another person who matters to me at the expense of everyone and everything else.

Judge William's criticism of the definition of possibility and necessity in romantic love parallels his criticism of the definition of infinite and finite. Judge William says:

...it is freedom and necessity, but it is also more, for 'freedom' as it is applied to first love is no more than the soulish freedom of an individual not yet clarified from the dregs of natural necessity. But the more freedom, the more complete the abandonment of devotion, and only he can be lavish of himself who possesses himself. In the religious the individuals become free-- he from false pride, she from false humility-- and between the lovers who hold one another in such a close embrace the religious presses in, not to separate them, but in order that she might surrender herself with a richer devotion than she had before dreamt of, and that he might not only receive her but surrender himself, and she receive the devotion. (E/O II, 61-62)

As we saw above, romantic love defines possibility and necessity in such a way that they seem to reinforce rather than negate each other. On the one hand, my lover is necessary to me in the sense that he defines me. I would not know what counts as attractiveness, sensitivity, and so on, if it were not for him. On the other hand, my lover only defines what counts as attractiveness, sensitivity,

and so on, insofar as he makes explicit standards which I held implicitly all along. In this respect, he is just one of many particular people who could have made these standards explicit for me and, insofar as this is the case, my relationship with him is not simply determined but is in some sense up to me.

The problem with this arrangement, as Judge William expresses it in the passage quoted above, is that it makes the other person an extension of myself. Insofar as I am in love with someone because he satisfies my needs, my standards of attractiveness, and so on, I cannot see him as a separate, autonomous individual. Insofar as I cannot see him as a separate, autonomous individual, I cannot really give to him. Romantic love is unavoidably self-centered and self-serving.

Judge William's discussion of the inadequacy of the definition of the eternal and the temporal in romantic love follows directly from his discussion of the inadequacy of the definition of possibility and necessity. As we saw above, romantic love comes into existence at a particular moment in time and yet it carries with it the conviction that it has existed and will exist forever. From Judge William's perspective, however, the latter conviction is, in some sense, an illusion, for it is based upon the conviction that the other person will always satisfy my needs. In this sense, the relationship only exists from moment to moment, for, when the other person inevitably

fails to satisfy my needs, I cannot help but lose my conviction that our relationship is eternal.

For Judge William, then, romantic love has three related problems: the absolute significance of the commitment undermines the significance of every other commitment; the commitment undermines my autonomy; and the commitment exists only from moment to moment. Judge William's solution to these problems is not surprising. Judge William argues that the parties to a relationship can overcome these problems if they choose themselves ethically. When I choose myself, I create a context in which my relationship to another person can exist. Rather than subsuming myself, the relationship takes its place, along with my calling, my friendships, and so on, as an important aspect of my self and my world rather than as my whole self and my whole world. Similarly, once I choose myself, I am an autonomous individual and I can therefore allow my partner to be an autonomous individual. I am clear about what my needs are and can set about trying to fulfill them without needing another person to define what they are and to satisfy them. Finally, when I have chosen myself, the relationship does not depend for its endurance upon the other person's satisfying my needs from moment to moment. Because I have formulated long-term goals and am engaged in carrying them out, I am able to see my relationships in this context as well and no longer require moment to moment satisfactions in order to sustain them.

Thus, Judge William concludes his discourse on a very contemporary note, arguing that if the partners to a relationship will just maintain open communication between themselves, the relationship will endure.

Now, as we saw in Chapter IV, Judge William's position contains irresolvable contradictions. Either Judge William recognizes that he gives all of his finite commitments their infinite significance, in which case he becomes conscious of his despair, or he covers up this recognition by losing himself in reflection upon his wife's immediate relationship to her finite commitments but forfeits his capacity to give infinite significance to his own finite commitments. Similar contradictions undermine Judge William's definitions of possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal, as we saw. The fact that Judge William cannot correct the inadequacies of romantic love, however, does not invalidate his insights about these inadequacies. The question which confronts us, then, is, how can I have commitments which are concrete like romantic love but which do not have the inadequacies of romantic love? And, if I have such commitments, will they define my self in such a way that I can preserve romantic love relative to them? In order to answer these questions, we must leave Either/Or and turn to another work by yet another pseudonym, Johannes Climacus' Philosophical Fragments.

Philosophical Fragments

Before beginning our discussion of Philosophical Fragments, it may be helpful to review the argument of this chapter up to this point. In the first section of this chapter, on Training In Christianity, we presented Anti-Climacus' argument that believing that an individual man is God is an offense to reason. In the second section of this chapter, on The Sickness Unto Death, we presented Anti-Climacus' argument that becoming an individual by imitating the God-man is also an offense to reason. In the third section of this chapter, on the "Preliminary Expectoration" of Fear and Trembling, we presented Johannes de Silentio's account of romantic love as an analogy to faith and in the fourth section of this chapter, on "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage", we presented Judge William's argument that romantic love is an inadequate definition of the self.

The question which now confronts us is the following: having seen how romantic love is like Religiousness B and having seen how it is unlike Religiousness B, can we say anything about Religiousness B itself without violating Anti-Climacus' stricture that Religiousness B is an offense

to reason and that we therefore cannot describe it directly?

In the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Johannes Climacus provides us with a way into this question when he contrasts romantic love and faith. Climacus says,

...all love is affected by illusion, and hence has a quasi-objective aspect...But when love is interpenetrated with a God-relationship, this imperfection of illusion disappears, together with the remaining semblance of objectivity...(CUP 52)

The difference between romantic love and Religiousness B is that romantic love is affected by "objectivity" and "illusion". What does this mean? And then what does a commitment without objectivity and illusion look like? In order to answer this question, Climacus employs yet another comparison. This time, however, the comparison is not an analogy but a contrast. In Philosophical Fragments, Climacus, the pseudonym who represents a particularly philosophical kind of rationality, contrasts the philosophical-- or, in this case, the Socratic-- view of the self with the Christian view. The Socratic view is like the Christian view and unlike romantic love insofar as it involves overcoming illusion. I come to see that I do not owe my self-knowledge to anyone. I only recognize Socrates as exemplifying self-knowledge because I already have self-knowledge. The Socratic view is like romantic love and unlike the Christian view insofar as losing my

illusions means gaining objectivity. As in romantic love, I know myself, but I know myself without the mediation of another person.

With this brief description of the Socratic view, we can begin to see that the Socratic view of the self is what we now think of as the therapeutic view of the self. This is how we will refer to it from here on out. This keeps us from having to argue about whether this was or was not Socrates' view. At the same time, it is clear that, insofar as it is the therapeutic view, and insofar as Kierkegaard sees it as the Socratic view, Kierkegaard would see our therapeutic views of the self as direct descendants of Greek views.

According to Climacus, the central tenet of the therapeutic view of the self is that I always already know what it is to be a self. I could not even ask the question of who I am if I did not already know the answer:

In so far as the Truth is conceived as something to be learned, its non-existence is evidently presupposed, so that in proposing to learn it one makes it the object of an inquiry. Here we are confronted with the difficulty to which Socrates calls attention in the Meno (80, near the end), and there characterizes as a 'pugnacious proposition'; one cannot seek for what he knows, and it seems equally impossible for him to seek for what he does not know. For what a man knows he cannot seek, since he knows it; and what he does not know he cannot seek, since he does not even know for what to seek. Socrates thinks the difficulty through in the doctrine of Recollection, by which all learning and inquiry is interpreted as a kind of remembering; one who is ignorant needs only a reminder to help him come to himself in the consciousness of what he knows. Thus the Truth is not introduced into the individual from

without, but was within him. (PF 11)

But if I already know who I am, my therapist plays a rather circumscribed role in my efforts to secure a sense of my own identity. My therapist does not give me my identity. Rather, she helps me to recognize that I already have an identity. Insofar as this is the case, she helps me to recognize that my belief that I owe my identity to her is the result of my projecting my implicit knowledge of who I am onto her. Her role is to allow me to recognize these projections for the illusions they are and thus to claim my identity as my own. Thus,

With this understanding of what it means to learn the Truth, the fact that I have been instructed by Socrates or by Prodicus or by a servant-girl, can concern me only historically; or in so far as I am a Plato in sentimental enthusiasm, it may concern me poetically. But this enthusiasm, beautiful as it is...this enthusiasm, so Socrates would say, is only an illusion, a want of clarity in a mind where earthly inequalities seethe almost voluptuously...for the Truth in which I rest was within me, and came to light through myself, and not even Socrates could have given it to me....which Socrates fearlessly expressed by saying that even in the lower world he proposed merely to ask questions; for the underlying principle of all questioning is that the one who is asked must have the Truth in himself, and be able to acquire it by himself...(PF 14-15)

In contrast to the therapeutic view, the central tenet of the Christian view of the self is that I do not always already know what it is to be a self. Indeed, as long as I am in the present age or one of the lower spheres of existence, I am actively combatting the knowledge of what it is to be a self. Thus, when I come to accept the

God-man as the paradigm for what it is to be a self, the God-man is not the occasion for my recognition that I knew what it was to be a self all along. Rather, the God-man is the occasion for my recognition that I was actively opposing this knowledge, that I was in sin:

If the Teacher serves as an occasion by means of which the learner is reminded, he cannot help the learner to recall that he really knows the Truth; for the learner is in a state of Error. What the Teacher can give him occasion to remember is, that he is in Error. (PF 17)

But if I do not know what it is to be a self, it is not enough that the God-man be the paradigm for what it is to be a self. He must also give me some way of recognizing that he is the paradigm, some condition which allows me to recognize that he defines what it is to be a self:

Now if the learner is to acquire the Truth, the Teacher must bring it to him; and not only so, but he must also give him the condition necessary for understanding it....The condition for understanding the Truth is like the capacity to inquire for it: the condition contains the conditioned, and the question implies the answer. (PF 17-18)

But if the God-man gives me the knowledge of what it is to be a self-- indeed, gives me the knowledge that I know what it is to be a self-- I am indebted to him in a way that I can never be indebted to my therapist. In therapy, as I become self-sufficient, I gain myself. In Religiousness B, if I become self-sufficient, I lose myself:

Such a Teacher the learner will never be able to forget. For the moment he forgets him he sinks back again into himself....Even when the

learner has most completely appropriated the condition, and most profoundly apprehended the Truth, he cannot forget his Teacher, or let him vanish Socratically, although this is far more profound than illusory sentimentality or untimely pettiness of spirit. It is indeed the highest, unless that other be the Truth. (PF 21-22)

With this initial contrast of the therapeutic and Christian views of the self, we can see why the therapeutic view overcomes illusion in the interest of objectivity while the Christian view overcomes illusion in the interest of a decidedly non-objective view of the self. The therapeutic view of the self is objective insofar as it involves self-knowledge. I overcome the illusion, common to both romantic love and psychoanalytic transference, that another person can give me my identity and recognize that I have had an identity all along; indeed, that, insofar as I believed that another person gave me my identity, I was unconsciously projecting my implicit knowledge of my own identity onto him or her. Therapy allows me to take back this projection and to develop my identity on the basis of a realistic knowledge of who I am.

Religiousness B, in contrast, involves neither illusion nor objectivity. It does not involve objectivity because it does not involve self-knowledge. I cannot know what it is to be a self. I have to have a paradigm for what it is to be a self and I cannot even recognize the paradigm as the paradigm unless the paradigm gives me the condition for recognizing it. But precisely because I cannot know what it is to be a self, Religiousness B does

not involve illusion, either. In romantic love, as we saw above, or in the psychoanalytic transference, I am under the illusion that another person has given me my identity. This illusion is an illusion precisely because it involves the projection onto another person of qualities I desire in myself or in another person but do not know that I desire. But, in the case of Religiousness B, my belief that the God-man is the paradigm for what it is to be a self cannot be based upon a projection because I cannot know, either consciously or unconsciously, what it is to be a self. Therefore, Religiousness B presents the unique case of a phenomenon which is not an illusion precisely insofar as it is not objective.

But this contrast between the therapeutic and the Christian views of the self immediately raises an important question-- namely, what is wrong with the therapeutic view of the self? What is wrong, in other words, with illusionless objectivity? Precisely because it is without illusions, the therapeutic self is not the self of romantic love. Indeed, the whole point of therapy is to get me to resolve the transference by taking back my projections and recognizing that I am the source of my own identity. Insofar as I successfully accomplish this, I overcome the three related problems of romantic love: I am the source of my own distinctions between what matters to me and what does not, I am autonomous and I do not live merely moment to moment. So why isn't this sufficient for being a self?

Why do I even need Religiousness B?

This question becomes even more pronounced when we see that Climacus has some very favorable things to say about the therapeutic view of the self. Indeed, Climacus claims that a therapeutic relationship is the highest relationship which can exist between two human beings: "...this relation is the highest that one human being can sustain to another....for even if a divine point of departure is ever given, between man and man this is the true relationship..." (PF 12)

Climacus' high estimation of therapeutic relationships between human beings is based, in part, upon his conviction that therapeutic relationships are profoundly egalitarian and, to that extent, profoundly moral. Precisely insofar as a therapist refrains from setting himself up above his client on the basis of his superior insight and thus refrains from moralizing, he can disarm his client's defenses and help him to change:

In the Socratic view each individual is his own center...It was thus Socrates understood himself, and thus he thought that everyone must understand himself, in the light of this understanding interpreting his relationship to each individual, with equal humility and with equal pride. He had the courage and self-possession to be sufficient unto himself, but also in his relations to his fellowmen to be merely an occasion, even when dealing with the meanest capacity. (PF 14)

Why, then is the therapeutic view of the self inadequate? Why do we need what Climacus calls "a divine point of departure" if we want to have the factors of the

synthesis in the right relation? Climacus begins to answer this question in Chapter III of Philosophical Fragments. Climacus begins by reiterating the therapeutic view that I always already know what it is to be a self:

...let us assume that we know what man is. Here we have that criterion of the Truth, which in the whole course of Greek philosophy was either sought, or doubted, or postulated, or made fruitful. (PF 47)

But, in contrast to his previous description of the therapeutic self, Climacus here describes the therapeutic self as inherently unstable, indeed, as inherently self-destructive:

So then we know what man is, and this wisdom, which I shall be the last to hold in light esteem, may progressively become richer and more significant, and with it also the Truth. But now the Reason stands still, just as Socrates did; for the paradoxical passion of the Reason is aroused and seeks a collision; without rightly understanding itself, it is bent upon its own downfall....[it] retroactively affects man and his self-knowledge, so that he who thought to know himself is no longer certain whether he is a more strangely composite animal than Typhon, or if perchance his nature contains a gentler and diviner part. (PF 48-49)

Therapeutic objectivity, according to Climacus, is an illusion. If I push my self-knowledge to its limits, I discover that I do not know myself at all. This is not to say that I do not know what my desires are, what my talents are, what influence my parents had on me, and so on. The knowledge at issue is not quantitative knowledge. It is not a matter of not knowing enough about myself. Rather, the knowledge at issue is qualitative knowledge. I want to

know what stand to take on all of this, what to accept and what to reject. In a word, I want to know which of these desires, talents, influences, and so on, really differentiate me and define me and which do not.

As soon as I ask this question, however, I recognize the illusory quality of therapeutic self-knowledge. As we saw in the previous two chapters, in order to decide which of my desires, talents, influences, and so on, differentiate me and define me and which do not, I must recognize that I am absolutely different from and absolutely undetermined by these desires, talents, influences, and so on. Insofar as I am not absolutely different from them and am not absolutely undetermined by them, my "self" is simply reducible to a more or less random assortment of determinate qualities. On the other hand, as we saw in our account of the breakdown of the ethical in Chapters IV and V, once I see myself as absolutely different from and absolutely undetermined by my determinate qualities, I have no self which can reclaim these qualities as its own. The ethical self is an empty illusion.

Climacus describes the way in which the ethical self comes to recognize the illusory quality of its self-knowledge in Chapter III of Philosophical Fragments:

What then is the Unknown? It is the limit to which the Reason repeatedly comes...it is the different, the absolutely different. But because it is absolutely different, there is no mark by which it could be distinguished. When qualified as absolutely different it seems on the verge of

disclosure, but this is not the case; for the Reason cannot conceive an absolute unlikeness. (PF 55)

Once I define myself as absolutely different from my determinate qualities, in other words, I cannot know myself, for reflection cannot understand an absolute difference. For reflection, to be absolutely different from my determinate qualities is to be absolutely indeterminate, to be nothing. If, on the other hand, I attempt to define myself as only relatively different from my determinate qualities, the difference collapses and I lose myself in the qualities: "If no specific determination of difference can be held fast, because there is no distinguishing mark, like and unlike finally become identified with one another, thus sharing the fate of all such dialectical opposites". (PF 56) In short, therapeutic self-knowledge is illusory, for either I am absolutely different from my determinate qualities and therefore cannot know myself because reflection cannot understand an absolute difference or I am absolutely the same as my determinate qualities and therefore cannot know myself because there is no self which is different from these qualities to know.

But with this account of the illusory quality of therapeutic self-knowledge we are finally in a position to be able to begin to appreciate the unique solution to the problem of self-definition offered by Religiousness B. Climacus himself makes the connection between the problem

we have just discussed and Religiousness B at the conclusion of his argument that reflection cannot understand an absolute difference. Climacus says:

As for the last named supposition, the self-irony of the Reason, I shall attempt to delineate it merely by a stroke or two, without raising any question of its being historical. There exists an individual whose appearance is precisely like that of other men; he grows up to manhood like others, he marries, he has an occupation by which he earns his livelihood, and he makes provision for the future as befits a man. For though it may be beautiful to live like the birds of the air, it is not lawful, and may lead to the sorriest of consequences: either starvation if one has enough persistence, or dependence on the bounty of others. This man is also the God. How do I know? I cannot know it, for in order to know it I would have to know the God, and the nature of the difference between the God and man; and this I cannot know, because the Reason has reduced it to likeness with that from which it was unlike. Thus the God becomes the most terrible of deceivers, because the Reason has deceived itself. The Reason has brought the God as near as possible, and yet he is as far away as ever. (PF 56-57)

If there is a God-man, in other words, he is someone who, by definition, is both absolutely different from and absolutely the same as other men. But since, as we have just seen, we cannot know that an absolute difference is an absolute difference, we cannot know that an individual man is God. But, if we cannot know that an individual man is God, how can we ever recognize the God-man? Climacus provides the beginning of an answer to this question when he says:

But how does the learner come to realize an understanding with this Paradox? We do not ask

that he understand the Paradox but only understand that this is the Paradox. (PF 72)

In order to see how I can understand that an individual is the paradigm without understanding the paradigm, it may be helpful to describe a case which is similar in form but different in content. In The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Thomas Kuhn argues that scientists do not derive the techniques and problems which define their respective scientific disciplines from a set of explicit rules and assumptions. Rather, they model their techniques and problems after those of a scientific achievement which they recognize as exemplary. Kuhn calls these exemplary achievements "paradigms" and says:

What [the various research problems and techniques that arise within a single normal-scientific tradition] have in common is not that they satisfy some explicit or even some fully discoverable set of rules and assumptions that gives the tradition its character and its hold upon the scientific mind. Instead, they may relate by resemblance and by modeling to one or another part of the scientific corpus which the community in question already recognizes as among its established achievements....Paradigms may be prior to, more binding, and more complete than any set of rules for research that could be unequivocally abstracted from them. (Kuhn 45-46)

But not only do scientists derive their problems and techniques from paradigms rather than from rules. More importantly, with respect to the issue which concerns us here, scientists cannot say what it is that makes their paradigms paradigmatic. As Kuhn says:

Scientists can agree that a Newton, Laviosier, Maxwell, or Einstein has produced an apparently permanent solution to a group of outstanding problems and still disagree, sometimes without being aware of it, about the particular abstract characteristics that make those solutions permanent. They can, that is, agree in their identification of a paradigm without agreeing on, or even attempting to produce, a full interpretation or rationalization of it. (Kuhn 44)

If we extend Kuhn's claim about the non-rationalizability of scientific paradigms to cover the paradigm under consideration here, we come inescapably to the conclusion that I can give no answer to the question of how I recognize the God-man as the God-man. I simply recognize him as the paradigm for what it is to be a self and model myself after him accordingly.

But this answer, as it stands, is obviously less than satisfactory. It leaves unanswered a crucial question--namely, why do I come to take this particular individual, Jesus Christ, as the paradigm for being a self? Even if I come to recognize the need for a paradigm in general, how do I come to recognize this particular individual as the paradigm?

With this question, we come face to face with the central problem of Philosophical Fragments. That problem, as Climacus states it in hindsight in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, is that "The eternal happiness of the individual is decided in time through the relationship to something historical, which is furthermore of such a character as to include in its composition that which by

virtue of its essence cannot become historical, and must therefore become such by virtue of an absurdity". (CUP 345) The problem, in other words, is how I can ever come to believe that a historical individual was God. Insofar as he was historical, we can understand his significance in the same way that we understand the significance of any other historical figure. Insofar as he is God, his significance is eternal. But how can the historical existence of an individual have eternal significance?

In order to begin to answer this question, we must first recall why the historical existence of the paradigm is essential to his being the paradigm. To do this, we need simply recall the first part of our discussion of Philosophical Fragments. As we saw there, I need a paradigm for what it is to be a self precisely because I cannot know what it is to be a self. But if I cannot know what it is to be a self, I cannot invent a paradigm for what it is to be a self out of the resources of my own imagination. Therefore, if I am to have a paradigm for what it is to be a self, I must be able to recognize an existing individual as the paradigm. The historical existence of the paradigm is therefore essential to his being the paradigm. If the God-man is the God-man, in other words, he has to have existed historically.

And yet, even though the paradigm has to have existed historically, precisely insofar as he is the paradigm, his historical existence does not have ordinary historical

significance. Indeed, from one perspective, it seems to have less than ordinary historical significance for, as Climacus argues, the ordinary historical details of the God-man's existence are irrelevant to his status as the God-man. Thus, Climacus claims that the historical contemporaries of the God-man have no special advantage when it comes to believing that he is the God-man:

The contemporary learner finds it easy enough to acquire adequate historical information.... But though a contemporary learner readily becomes an historical eye-witness, the difficulty is that the knowledge of some historical circumstance, or indeed a knowledge of all the circumstances with the reliability of an eye-witness, does not make such an eye-witness a disciple; which is apparent from the fact that this knowledge has merely historical significance for him. (PF 73)

As we saw in the first section of this chapter, in other words, there is nothing directly different about the God-man which makes him the God-man. None of the historical details of his life directly differentiate him from anyone else. Therefore, even the most thorough knowledge of these details cannot be the basis for belief in the God-man. Indeed, quite the opposite is the case. Climacus claims that becoming a believer requires no knowledge of historical details at all. All I need to know in order to become a believer is that the God-man existed:

We see at once that the historical in the more concrete sense is a matter of indifference; we may suppose a degree of ignorance with respect

to it, and permit this ignorance as if to annihilate one detail after the other, historically annihilating the historical... (PF 73)

If the fact spoken of were a simple historical fact, the accuracy of the historical sources would be of great importance. Here this is not the case, for Faith cannot be distilled from even the nicest accuracy of detail. The historical fact that the God has been in human form is the essence of the matter; the rest of the historical detail is not even as important as if we had to do with a human being instead of with the God. (PF 130)

Indeed, Climacus even goes so far as to claim that the New Testament as we know it need not have been written in order for there to be disciples of the God-man:

If the contemporary generation had left nothing behind them but these words: 'We have believed that in such and such a year the God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died,' it would be more than enough. The contemporary generation would have done all that was necessary; for this little advertisement; this nota bene on a page of universal history, would be sufficient to afford an occasion for a successor, and the most voluminous account can in all eternity do nothing more. (PF 130-131)

The question which obviously confronts us here, then, is: how can it be the case that, in order to become a self, all I need to know is that the paradigm for being a self existed? In order to answer this question, it may be helpful to recall the analogy between Religiousness B and romantic love. As we saw above, romantic love is analogous

to Religiousness B insofar as it involves having a finite commitment which is of infinite significance. Insofar as the God-man is the paradigm for being a self, he is the paradigm for having a finite commitment which is of infinite significance.

As we saw in the last section, romantic love differs from Religiousness B insofar as it involves objectivity and illusion. The person to whom I am committed is, in some sense, the projection of my own desires. Thus, as we saw in Judge William's account of romantic love, if romantic love is my only commitment, I will not be a self. The therapeutic response to this problem is, as we saw above, to overcome the illusion while retaining the objectivity. But therapy, too, cannot give me a self, for, once I have attained the requisite objectivity, I am in the position of being either absolutely different from my desires, talents, roles, etc., or absolutely identical to them.

If the God-man is the paradigm for being a self, then, he must have a commitment analogous to romantic love but without the illusion and without the objectivity. He must, in other words, have finite commitments which are of infinite significance to him in such a way that he is both absolutely different from his commitments and absolutely identical to them.

But if this is the case, we can see why Climacus says that we do not need to know the historical details of the God-man's life in order to believe that he was the God-man.

The God-man's particular commitments do not make him the God-man. His being the paradigm for having concrete commitments is not based upon what he was committed to but, rather, upon how he was committed to what he was committed to. Thus, I do not have to have the commitments he had or even commitments which indirectly resemble his in order to be a believer. I do not have to throw money-changers out of temples or television evangelists off the air. Rather, I need to have my concrete commitments in the same way that he had his concrete commitments. Once again, Kuhn provides us with a parallel to this type of resemblance to a paradigm when he says:

...when I speak of acquiring from exemplars the ability to recognize a given situation as like some and unlike others....I am claiming that the explication will not, by its nature, answer the question, 'Similar with respect to what?' That question is a request for a rule, in this case for the criteria by which particular situations are grouped into similarity sets, and I am arguing that the temptation to seek criteria (or at least a full set) should be resisted in this case. (Kuhn 192)

The God-man is the God-man, in other words, because he is the paradigm for having concrete commitments. Having concrete commitments involves being absolutely different from my commitments, for, if I were not absolutely different from them, I could not be differentiated from them and, therefore, they could not differentiate me. At the same time, having concrete commitments involves being absolutely identical to my concrete commitments, for, if I were not absolutely identical to them, I could not be

identified with them and they therefore could not give me my identity.

To state the matter in slightly different terms: in the despair of the ethical sphere, I realize that, once I see myself as absolutely different from my concrete commitments, I am unable to have any concrete commitments. In the despair of Religiousness A, I realize that, once I see myself as absolutely different from my concrete commitments, I am unable not to have any concrete commitments. Only in Religiousness B am I both absolutely different from my concrete commitments and absolutely identical to them. When I recognize the God-man as the God-man, I recognize a paradigm of what it is to have concrete commitments. Though I cannot say how I recognize him as having concrete commitments, I do recognize him. And, though I cannot say how my concrete commitments resemble his, they do resemble his.

But with this account, we can begin to make some sense out of Climacus' claim that the contemporary generation need only recount that the God-man existed and that it need not recount any of the particular details of his existence. None of the God-man's particular commitments make him the God-man. The reports of the contemporary generation would be absolutely misleading if they tried to make the case that some particular commitment or commitments make the God-man the God-man. As we saw in the first section of this chapter, however, the reports of the

contemporary generation do not make this case. Instead, in their unrelenting insistence on the offensive nature of the claim that an individual is God, they make precisely the opposite case-- namely, that none of the God-man's particular commitments directly differentiate him and define him as the God-man.

But with this clarification of Climacus' claim that none of the historical details of the God-man's existence make him the God-man, we are in a position to make sense of Climacus' related claim that the contemporary generation need only report that the God-man existed. As should be becoming clear by now, this claim cannot mean what it initially appears to mean-- namely, that the contemporary generation need say nothing about the God-man at all. Rather, as we can now see, it means something much more subtle-- namely, that the contemporary generation must provide an account of the God-man's existence in such a way as to indicate that he is the paradigm for having concrete commitments and that the contemporary generation can only provide such an account to the extent that it indicates that none of the God-man's particular commitments make him the God-man.

To state the matter in slightly different terms: the God-man is the God-man because he has an infinite commitment to something finite. I am like the God-man when I have an infinite commitment to something finite. In order to be like the God-man, I have to recognize him as

having an infinite commitment to something finite. Therefore, I have to recognize his finite commitments. But my finite commitments do not have to be like his finite commitments. Rather, my finite commitments must have the same kind of infinite significance for me as his finite commitments have for him. Thus, in order to imitate the God-man, I must have a report from the contemporary generation which indicates that the God-man had an infinite commitment to something finite and that he had an infinite commitment to something finite precisely insofar as his particular finite commitment is of infinite significance to himself alone. To return to the analogy which we have employed throughout this chapter: a report that a great romance existed would only be convincing if it told us something about the particular individuals involved but it would be a mistake to conclude that I could only be involved in a great romance if I loved someone who was like one of the individuals in this particular relationship. If such a report can be helpful to me at all, it can only be so to the extent that it helps me to have a relationship in which a particular person is as important to me as the particular people in the reported relationship are to each other. Thus, in one respect, I need to know the particular details of their relationship and in another respect I do not.

With this account of the peculiar significance of the God-man's particular commitments, we have demonstrated the

non-rationalizability of the relationship between infinite and finite in Religiousness B. It remains, then, to provide the parallel accounts for the relationships between possibility and necessity and the eternal and the temporal. Our account of the non-rationalizability of the relationship between possibility and necessity in Religiousness B follows directly from the account we have just given of the non-rationalizability of the relationship between infinite and finite. As we saw above, insofar as he is the paradigm for having the infinite and finite factors in the right relation, the God-man has to have existed historically. However, since, as we also saw above, we cannot rationally demonstrate that the God-man had the infinite and finite factors in the right relation, we cannot rationally demonstrate that the existence of the God-man is possible. Thus, the statement that the God-man has to have existed historically is a conditional statement. It says that, if Religiousness B exists, the God-man has to have existed. But, since we can never prove that Religiousness B exists, we can never have empirical evidence that the God-man existed. Climacus summarizes this conclusion when he says:

The historical fact for a contemporary is that the God has come into existence; for the member of a later generation the historical fact is that the God has been present through having come into existence.... Every time the believer makes this fact an object of his Faith, every time he makes it historical for himself, he re-instates the dialectical determinations of

coming into existence with respect to it. If ever so many thousands of years have intervened, if the fact came to entail ever so many consequences, it does not on that account become more necessary (and the consequences themselves, from an ultimate point of view, are only relatively necessary, since they derive from the freely effecting cause); to say nothing of the topsy-turvy notion that the fact might become necessary by reason of the consequences, the consequences being wont to seek their ground in something else, and not to constitute a ground for that of which they are the consequences. If a contemporary or a predecessor saw ever so clearly the preparations, perceived intimations and symptoms of what was about to come, the fact was nevertheless not necessary when it came into existence. That is to say, this fact is no more necessary when viewed as future, than it is necessary when viewed as past. (PF 109-110)

Climacus' claim that the God-man's existence can never become necessary-- either because of the consequences it has supposedly produced or because of the circumstances which supposedly produced it-- leads directly, of course, to his claim that the relationship between the eternal and the temporal in the God-man is non-rationalizable. For Religiousness B, as we have seen, the historical, or temporal, existence of the God-man has eternal significance. Thus, while none of the ordinary historical details of the God-man's existence make him the God-man, his historical existence is absolutely essential to his being the God-man. But this means, once again, that there can be no rational or empirical grounds for believing in the God-man. If the God-man existed, his existence is paradigmatic for people in every historical period, not simply for people in his own. From this perspective, it is clear that people who lived before the God-man came into

existence never had the possibility of becoming individuals while individuals who live after he came into existence always have this possibility open to them. But this is precisely what is so offensive about the claim that an individual's historical existence has eternal significance. If we have not always already known what it is to be an individual, how can we recognize a particular person as the paradigm for what it is to be an individual? And if we have always already known what it is to be an individual, why do we need a paradigm for what it is to be an individual? Climacus indicates the seriousness of this offense when he says:

It is easy to see though it scarcely needs to be pointed out, since it is involved in the fact that the Reason is set aside, that Faith is not a form of knowledge; for all knowledge is either a knowledge of the Eternal, excluding the temporal and historical as indifferent, or it is pure historical knowledge. No knowledge can have for its object the absurdity that the Eternal is the historical. If I know Spinoza's doctrine, then I am in so far not concerned with Spinoza but with his doctrine; at some other time I may be concerned historically with Spinoza himself. But the disciple is in Faith so related to his Teacher as to be eternally concerned with his historical existence. (PF 76)

From the eternal point of view, one does not have Faith that the God exists, even if one assumes that he does exist. The use of the word Faith in this connection enshrines a misunderstanding. Socrates did not have faith that the God existed. What he knew about the God he arrived at by way of Recollection; the God's existence was for him by no means historical existence. If his knowledge of the God was

imperfect in comparison with his who according to our supposition receives the condition from the God himself, this does not concern us here; for Faith does not have to do with essence, but with being [historical existence].... No question is here raised as to the true content of this; the question is if one will give assent to the God's having come into existence, by which the God's eternal essence is inflected in the dialectical determinations of coming into existence. (PF 108-109)

With this account of the rational contradictions involved in believing that an individual is God, we have concluded our discussion of the offense to rationality in Religiousness B. Before concluding our discussion of Religiousness B all together, it remains to discuss the other offense in Religiousness B, the offense which we have called the offense to immediacy and which Anti-Climacus, in Training In Christianity, calls the offense of believing that God is an individual. To conclude our discussion of Religiousness B, then, we return to the text with which we began, Training in Christianity.

6

Training in Christianity

and

Fear and Trembling: Problems I, II and III

In Section C of Part II of Training In Christianity, Anti-Climacus describes the second form of the offense in Religiousness B as "the possibility of the essential offense which has to do with lowliness, for the fact that one who gives Himself out to be God shows Himself to be the poor and suffering and at last the impotent man". (TC 105)

Anti-Climacus describes the difference between this second form of the offense and the first form of the offense as follows:

In this instance one is not offended by the claim that He is God, but by the observation that God is this man....In the foregoing section the man who was about to be offended, who was brought to a halt by the possibility of offence, said, 'An individual man like us wants to be God.' Here the man who is brought to a halt by the possibility of offence says, 'Supposing for an instant that thou art God, what folly and madness it is that thou art this lowly, poor, impotent man!' (TC 105)

As we saw in the first section of this chapter, Anti-Climacus illustrated the offense to rationality with

examples from the New Testament. He illustrates the offense to immediacy in the same manner. Anti-Climacus' illustration immediately points up the difference between the two forms of the offense, for, as he points out, the second form of the offense is a stumbling block precisely for those people who have overcome the first form of the offense-- namely, Christ's disciples. The disciples believe that Jesus is God. This belief qualifies them as disciples. But the disciples cannot believe that God should have to suffer in the way that Jesus obviously suffers. Thus,

...their offense cannot possibly have reference to loftiness, the doubt lest He, their teacher and master, might not be what He said He was. No, that is what they believe. It has reference to lowliness, that He, the highly exalted, the Only Begotten of the Father, should suffer in this way, should be delivered helpless into the power of his enemies. (TC 106)

Anti-Climacus cites as a specific example of the second form of the offense the conversation between Jesus and Peter in Matthew 26 which anticipates Peter's denial of Christ: "'This night ye shall all be offended in Me. But Peter answered and said unto Him, Though all were to be offended in Thee, yet will I not be offended'". (TC 106) But, as Anti-Climacus points out, there are numerous other examples:

Beside the passages cited above as examples of the possibility of offence at the lowliness of

the God-man, there are of course very many which imply it without using exactly this word. The whole story of the Passion is an example. (TC 108)

Such are Anti-Climacus' Biblical examples of the offense to immediacy. The question which confronts us here, however, is, what does the existence of these examples tell us about the nature of Religiousness B? If Jesus Christ is the paradigm for Religiousness B and he suffers in a way that is offensive, what does this tell us about the kind of suffering that an individual who imitates him will have to undergo?

In contrast to his discussion of the offense to rationality, most of Anti-Climacus' discussion of the offense to immediacy is taken up with questions about what it means to imitate the God-man rather than with questions about the nature of the God-man himself. Indeed, it is in Supplement 2 to Section C that Anti-Climacus specifically proposes the notion of the God-man as paradigm which we cited at the beginning of this chapter: "Christ's life here upon earth is the paradigm; it is in likeness to it that I along with every Christian must strive to construct my life..." (TC 109) Why, then, does constructing my life in likeness to the paradigm involve suffering and what does this suffering tell us about the nature of Religiousness B? What does it mean to say that "...to be a follower means that thy life has as great a likeness to His as it is possible for a man's life to have"? (TC 108)

According to Climacus, "the decisive mark of Christian

suffering is the fact that it is voluntary..." (TC 111)

Christian suffering, in other words, is not the ordinary suffering of everyday life to which everyone, Christian or non-Christian, is exposed-- the involuntary suffering of illness, of loss, of grief, and so on. Rather, it is "the suffering which Christ and Christianity themselves brought into the world". (TC 110) This suffering, as Anti-Climacus makes clear, is the direct result of the claim of Religiousness B to be absolute. If the commitments I have in Religiousness B are of absolute significance for me, everything else is, by definition, of relative significance to me. Thus, at every moment there exists the possibility that I may have to sacrifice what is of relative significance --my desires, my social roles, my lover--for the sake of my absolute commitment. As Anti-Climacus says: "Christ attaches infinite importance to entering into life, to eternal blessedness, regarding it as the absolute good...What therefore really offends is the endless passion with which the eternal blessedness is conceived..."(TC 113)

To state the matter in slightly different terms, the offense to immediacy is a necessary consequence of the fact that Religiousness B claims to provide a solution to the levelling of the present age. The levelling of the present age, as we saw in Chapter I, makes all distinctions relative. As a result of this levelling, people in the present age calculate the costs and benefits of any action before undertaking it in order to minimize the risk of pain

and loss. In Religiousness B, in contrast, these risks are always present, precisely because the individual in Religiousness B has an absolute commitment. Thus, the individual in Religiousness B is at a double risk. In the first place, he is always in the position of knowing that he may have to sacrifice what is of relative importance to him for the sake of what is of absolute importance to him. In the second place, he is always vulnerable to the attacks of people in the present age who, without being able to understand how he has overcome the levelling of the present age, nonetheless perceive his having overcome it as a threat. As Anti-Climacus says:

When a man so lives that he recognizes no higher standard for his life than that provided by the understanding, his whole life is relativity, labor for a relative end; he undertakes nothing unless the understanding, by the aid of probability, can somehow make clear to him the profit and loss and give answer to the question, why and wherefore. It is different with the absolute. At the first glance the understanding ascertains that this is madness. To relegate a whole life to suffering, to immolation, is for the understanding mere madness. If I must subject myself to suffering, says the understanding, if I must sacrifice something, or in some way sacrifice myself, then I want to know what profit or advantage I can get out of it; otherwise I am crazy if I do it. But to say to a man, 'Go now out into the world, it will befall thee thus: thou wilt be persecuted year after year, and the end of it will be that finally thou wilt come to a frightful death'--then says the understanding, 'What is there in it?' The answer is, 'Nothing'--it is an expression of the fact that the absolute exists. But this is precisely what offends the understanding. (TC 118)

Religiousness B, then, is an offense to immediacy on two counts: first, because it requires the sacrifice of what is relative for the sake of what is absolute; second, because it incites opposition from those who perceive a life of absolute commitment as a threat to their lives of relative non-commitment. Indeed, not only the non-committed perceive a life of absolute commitment as a threat. As Anti-Climacus points out, Peter tries to convince Jesus not to go to Jerusalem for the essentially selfish reason that Peter does not want to lose his friend. It is an offense to him that, for Jesus, friendship should become relative in relation to his absolute commitment. Thus, Anti-Climacus says: "The trait for which Peter is an offense to Christ is the exact opposite of that for which Christ is an offense to Peter. Peter is the most lovable edition of human sympathy--but of human sympathy, and therefore to Christ an offense." (TC 121)

With this description of the second form of the offense, however, it is less clear than ever why anyone would want to have the kind of absolute commitment which defines Religiousness B. To speak rather crassly, it is unclear what anyone would expect to get out of such a commitment. Anti-Climacus indicates his awareness of this response to the second form of the offense when he says:

The objection is that Christianity is misanthropical....in comparison with that which the natural man ...regards as love, friendship, and the like, Christianity seems like hatred for

the ideal of what it is to be a man, like the greatest curse and torment to the ideal of what it is to be a man. Yes, even a deeper man may have moments when it seems as if Christianity were hostile to man. (TC 118-119)

And yet, as we are now in a position to begin to be able to see, there is a very real sense in which Religiousness B is not at all hostile to man; in which, quite to the contrary, Religiousness B gives everyday life a kind of significance which the present age and the lower spheres of existence can never give it. Paradoxically enough, Religiousness B gives everyday life this significance precisely insofar as it insists on the absolute nature of commitment and on the relativity of all other commitments in relation to an individual's absolute commitment. In order to see how this is the case, we must turn back to the "Preliminary Expectoration" of Fear and Trembling and to the discussion which directly precedes de Silentio's comparison of Knights of Resignation and Knights of Faith.

Before turning to this discussion, however, we must turn briefly to another discussion in Fear and Trembling--indeed, to perhaps the most famous discussion in that book, if not in all of Kierkegaard's works--namely, de Silentio's discussion of the problem of the teleological suspension of the ethical. Anti-Climacus' description of the second form of the offense has put us in the proper position to understand de Silentio's discussion because it has emphasized the absolute nature of commitment in Religiousness B. Thus, it enables us to understand the

significance of de Silentio's insistence at the end of Problem II that "Either there is an absolute duty toward God, and if so it is the paradox here described, that the individual as the individual is higher than the universal and as the individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute/or else faith never existed..." (FT 91)

If my commitment in Religiousness B is absolute, in other words, all of my other commitments are relative in relation to it--including my commitment to ethical norms. Thus, if I am in Religiousness B and a conflict arises between my commitment in Religiousness B and ethical norms, I may be called upon to violate the norms for the sake of my absolute commitment. Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac is an example of this kind of violation of ethical norms for the sake of a higher imperative. It is an example, in other words, of a teleological suspension of the ethical.

Now, it is imperative to note that de Silentio does not take the notion of a teleological suspension of the ethical at all lightly. Abraham is filled with anxiety--with what The Concept of Anxiety calls a "sympathetic antipathy"--at the prospect of his sacrifice of his son. Indeed, the absence of anxiety in such a situation is a sure sign that an individual is not called upon to suspend the ethical but is giving in to some kind of temptation. Thus, de Silentio's discussion in Problem III is devoted to establishing criteria for making the

distinction between suspending the ethical and giving in to temptation--between acting on the basis of an absolute commitment which, as we have seen, cannot be rationally justified, and acting on the basis of an unclarified immediate impulse which, like all unclarified immediate impulses, must be subjected to ethical clarification and rejected insofar as it violates ethical canons of universalizability and intelligibility. Indeed, these canons of universalizability and intelligibility are precisely what allow de Silentio, in Problems I and II, to make a distinction between the teleological suspension of the ethical and the actions of a tragic hero. As de Silentio makes clear, the tragic hero suspends one ethical norm for the sake of a higher ethical norm. Thus, Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia for the sake of the welfare of his people as a whole. Insofar as he suspends one ethical norm for the sake of a higher ethical norm, the tragic hero can make himself intelligible to others and has not teleologically suspended the ethical.

The Knight of Faith, on the other hand, can make himself intelligible to no one. Thus, in one of the most moving passages in all of Kierkegaard's writings, de Silentio says at the end of Problem II:

The Knight of Faith is obliged to rely upon himself alone, he feels the pain of not being able to make himself intelligible to others, but he feels no vain desire to guide others. The pain is his assurance that he is in the right way, this vain desire he does not know, he is too serious for that. The false knight of faith readily betrays himself by this proficiency in

guiding which he has acquired in an instant. He does not comprehend what it is all about, that if another individual is to take the same path, he must become entirely in the same way the individual and have no need of any man's guidance, least of all the guidance of a man who would obtrude himself. At this point men leap aside, they cannot bear the martyrdom of being uncomprehended, and instead of this they choose conveniently enough the worldly admiration of their proficiency. The true knight of faith is a witness, never a teacher, and therein lies his deep humanity.... he knows that what is truly great is equally accessible to all. (FT 90-91)

Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, then, is one example of the consequences of having an absolute commitment--namely, that having an absolute commitment may mean sacrificing my relative commitments. In the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, however, Johannes Climacus argues that, in one respect, this example is misleading, since it implies that individuals in Religiousness B only suspend the ethical in specific situations. In fact, says Climacus, an individual in Religiousness B is always suspending the ethical in the sense that he is always acting on the basis of an absolute commitment which he can never rationally justify. (CUP 238-239) Thus, while an individual in Religiousness B may also be called upon to suspend ethical norms in a specific situation like Abraham's, he is always suspending the ethical just by existing in Religiousness B.

But Climacus' recognition that Abraham is a somewhat anomalous example of the teleological suspension of the ethical allows us to recognize that he is an anomalous example of Religiousness B in another respect as well. As we saw in the last section, Religiousness B only exists if

the God-man existed. But, if this is the case, how can de Silentio use Abraham, who lived before the God-man existed, as an example of an individual in Religiousness B? How can Abraham be in Religiousness B, in other words, if he cannot imitate the God-man?

With the posing of this question, we are in a position to recognize one of the most original aspects of Anti-Climacus' idea of Christ as paradigm. In his discussion of the difference between ordinary human suffering and Christian suffering, Anti-Climacus parodies a preacher who, in order to console a man who has lost his wife, compares the man's loss to Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. Anti-Climacus' point, again, is that there is an absolute difference between involuntary suffering and voluntary suffering. But Anti-Climacus uses this example of the misuse of the Abraham example to make another point, as well. This point is that "...the minor religious paradigms are customarily taken in vain". (TC 110) And, Anti-Climacus adds, "And so it is also with the paradigm, Christ Himself, and with the derived Christian paradigms. One has become entirely oblivious to what is meant by Christian suffering properly so called and the derived Christian paradigms. (TC 111)

In this discussion, Anti-Climacus adds two important refinements to his basic idea of Christ as paradigm. Taken together, they indicate that, while Christ is the paradigm par excellence of what it is to be a self, he is not the

only paradigm. There are, in addition to Christ, what Anti-Climacus calls "minor" paradigms and "derived" paradigms. From the context in which Anti-Climacus introduces these notions, we can understand the difference between them. Minor paradigms are individuals like Abraham who precede Christ historically and whom we recognize as paradigms retroactive to Christ's existence. Derived paradigms are individuals who live after Christ and whom we recognize as imitating him.

Anti-Climacus' idea of minor paradigms is not, of course, absolutely original to him. We can recognize a precedent for it, for example, in Paul's exaltation of Abraham as an individual who had faith before the existence of the law. But Climacus' idea of minor paradigms does serve to justify de Silentio's use of Abraham as an example of faith. Having recognized what faith is through Christ, we can recognize something like it, a kind of "minor" version of it, in Abraham and, presumably, in other characters in the Old Testament. Insofar as this is the case, Christian faith does not deny the importance of the Old Testament but asserts its importance in providing a fund of examples for contemporary Christian existence. Insofar as this is the case, the critical contention that Kierkegaardian Christianity involves a radical rejection of Jewish and Christian tradition in favor of an exclusive commitment to Christ (Rorty 53) can be seen to be profoundly mistaken. That Kierkegaard's most passionate

work makes use of the story of Abraham and Isaac to convey its image of Christian faith constitutes a profound refutation of this view.

Like his idea of minor paradigms, Anti-Climacus' idea of derived paradigms also provides a place for tradition in Christian faith, for it means that, having indirectly recognized Christ as paradigm, we can indirectly recognize individuals who succeed him historically as resembling him. Thus, Christian history after Christ, like Jewish history before him, provides a fund of examples for contemporary Christian existence. Furthermore, it helps to bridge the historical gap between Jesus' time and our own. Through the recognition of more contemporary paradigms--Martin Luther King, for example-- we can imitate Christ in our own historical situation. Once again, then, Anti-Climacus' idea of Christ as paradigm is not meant to be exclusive in the sense of excluding other paradigms. It is exclusive only in the sense that we can only recognize derived paradigms if we first recognize the paradigm from whom they are derived, Jesus Christ.

Now, it goes without saying that, just as my recognition of the God-man is indirect, so too is my recognition of minor and derived paradigms. Just as I cannot say how my commitments resemble those of the God-man, so, too, I cannot say how Abraham's commitments or Martin Luther King's commitments resemble those of the God-man. It is important to keep this in mind lest we

confuse faith with the stance of the tragic hero. We can, for example, recognize Martin Luther King as a tragic hero who sacrificed his life for the sake of an ethical standard which society did not yet recognize. Indeed, as Anti-Climacus makes clear in Section A of Part II of Training In Christianity, we can recognize Jesus in the same way. Neither of these identifications is wrong. Both Jesus and Martin Luther King did sacrifice their lives for the sake of a higher ethical standard than that currently recognized by their respective societies. But this sacrifice for the sake of a higher ethical standard, important as it is, is not what makes Jesus the God-man or Martin Luther King a Knight of Faith, if they indeed were such. If they were such, it is because they each had an absolute commitment and absolute commitment is no more directly visible in their case than it is in the case of an ordinary individual with no claims to heroism whatsoever. To fail to understand this is to seriously distort the meaning of faith.

But with this recapitulation of the difference between heroism and faith, we are in a position to discuss the final issue which confronts us in this chapter. As we noted above, Anti-Climacus' unrelenting emphasis upon the absolute nature of commitment in Religiousness B and his concomitant emphasis upon the ever-present possibility that I will be called upon to sacrifice my relative commitments for the sake of my absolute commitment cannot

help but cause us to ask how anyone could ever find Religiousness B an attractive position. What can I possibly gain from such an absolute commitment? As we indicated above, it is possible to make a case that there is, indeed, something to be gained from such an absolute commitment. In order to see what this might be, we must return to the "Preliminary Expectoration" of Fear and Trembling.

Fear and Trembling: "Preliminary Expectoration"

As we saw in the last section, Religiousness B is an offense to immediacy because an absolute commitment can require the sacrifice of relative commitments. Thus, "The objection is that Christianity is misanthropical.... in comparison with that which the natural man regards as love, friendship, and the like, Christianity seems like hatred for the ideal of what it is to be a man... (TC 118-119)

And yet, as we are now in a position to see, the absolute commitment which Religiousness B opposes to relative commitments gives relative commitments a kind of significance which the present age and the three lower spheres of existence cannot give them. We can see this if we turn to the middle section of the "Preliminary Expectoration". As we saw in our initial discussion of the "Preliminary Expectoration", de Silentio introduces this section with the admission that he cannot provide an example of a Knight of Faith: "I candidly admit that in my practice I have not found any reliable example of the knight of faith, though I would not therefore deny that every second man may be such an example". (FT 49) This

inability to provide an example of faith leads de Silentio, in the third section, to provide an analogy to faith, romantic love. However, before providing an analogy to faith, de Silentio does attempt to describe a Knight of Faith. Since he cannot provide an actual example of a Knight of Faith, he creates an example in imagination. As de Silentio says, "As was said, I have not found any such person, but I can well think him". (FT 49)

Now, it goes without saying that, given the argument of the main body of this chapter, we cannot accept de Silentio's claim that, though he cannot provide an actual example of a Knight of Faith, he can think a Knight of Faith. As we have seen, Religiousness B is an offense to rationality precisely because we cannot think it and we cannot think it precisely because our only access to it is through examples of it which we cannot recognize directly. But, if this is the case, what de Silentio's lengthy description of a Knight of Faith describe?

We can answer this question if we consider the issue of the relationship between an absolute commitment and relative commitments from a perspective opposite to that from which we have considered it so far. In our discussion up to this point, we have argued that the absolute significance of an absolute commitment overrides the relative significance of relative commitments. But the opposite is also the case: an absolute commitment, precisely by virtue of its being absolute, gives relative

commitments their relative significance. As we saw in Chapter III, a commitment to enjoyment cannot be an absolute commitment. The person in the aesthetic sphere who tries to make enjoyment absolute self-destructs. Similarly, as we saw in Chapter IV, a commitment to choice cannot be an absolute commitment. The person in the ethical sphere who tries to make choice absolute also self-destructs. This is not to say, however, that enjoyment and choice have no legitimate claims to significance in an individual's life. It is only to say that their claims are relative, not absolute, and that they are relative to the claims of my absolute commitment. Once I have an absolute commitment, I can enjoy myself precisely because I am not trying to make enjoyment absolute. Similarly, once I have an absolute commitment, I can make choices about my life precisely because I am not trying to make choice absolute. Indeed, I may enjoy my absolute commitment and I may find that my ability to make choices helps me to further it. But I can enjoy it and further it through my choices only insofar as my commitment, and not enjoyment or choice, is absolute. De Silentio illustrates this when he uses the example of the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man to make a point opposite to that which Anti-Climacus would make with it but which only makes sense in the light of Anti-Climacus' emphasis upon the absoluteness of commitment. For de Silentio, the rich young man's sacrifice--or, as he terms it here

"resignation"-- of his wealth as absolute is precedent to his getting it back as relative. As de Silentio says:

By virtue of resignation that rich young man should have given away everything, but then when he had done that, the knight of faith should have said to him, 'By virtue of the absurd thou shalt get every penny back again. Canst thou believe that?' And this speech ought by no means have been indifferent to the aforesaid rich young man, for in case he gave away his goods because he was tired of them, his resignation was not much to boast of. (FT 59-60)

In the light of these remarks, we can make sense of de Silentio's attempt to "think" a Knight of Faith. De Silentio says:

He takes delight in everything, and whenever one sees him taking part in a particular pleasure, he does it with the persistence which is the mark of the earthly man whose soul is absorbed in such things....In the afternoon he walks to the forest. He takes delight in everything he sees, in the human swarm, in the new omnibuses, in the water of the Sound; when one meets him on the Beach Road one might suppose he was a shopkeeper taking his fling....He lounges at an open window and looks out on the square on which he lives; he is interested in everything that goes on, in a rat which slips under the curb, in the children's play, and this with the nonchalance of a girl of sixteen. (FT 50-51)

The Knight of Faith, in other words, can appreciate aesthetic enjoyment for what it is precisely because he knows that it is not absolute. Indeed, precisely because he knows that aesthetic enjoyments is not absolute, the Knight of Faith can throw himself uninhibitedly into aesthetic enjoyment in a manner which the aesthete of "The Rotation Method" would find unimaginable.

De Silentio continues: "He tends to his work. So when one looks at him one might suppose that he was a clerk who had lost his soul in an intricate system of book-keeping, so precise is he. (FT 50) The Knight of Faith, in other words, devotes as much clarity to his work as Judge William could ever demand and yet he does so because, unlike Judge William, he knows that clarity is not absolute. Because he has a commitment which is of absolute significance to him, he can employ his clarity in the service of that commitment, as well as in the service of his relative commitments. Clarity is a means to the realization of his ends and not, as it is for Judge William, an end in itself.

Finally, de Silentio says:

Toward evening he walks home, his gait is as indefatigable as that of the postman. On his way he reflects that his wife has surely a special little warm dish prepared for him, e.g. a calf's head roasted, garnished with vegetables. If he were to meet a man like-minded, he could continue as far as East Gate to discourse with him about that dish, with a passion befitting a hotel chef. As it happens, he hasn't four pence to his name, and yet he fully and firmly believes that his wife has that dainty dish for him. If she had it, it would then be an invidious sight for superior people and an inspiring one for the plain man, to see him eat; for his appetite is greater than Esau's. His wife hasn't it--strangely enough, it is quite the same to him. On the way he comes past a building site and runs across another man. They talk together for a moment. In the twinkling of an eye he erects a new building, he has at his disposition all the powers necessary for it. The stranger leaves him with the thought that he certainly was a capitalist, while my admired knight thinks, 'Yes, if the money were need, I dare say I could get it'. (FT 50-51)

In this case, understanding the significance of de Silentio's relation of these two incidents together is critical to understanding the significance of each incident separately. The first incident, taken by itself, is a perfect description of the equanimity of Religiousness A. Whether the Knight of Faith gets his meal or does not is, finally, "quite the same to him". And yet, if this incident is intended to parallel the two incidents we have just discussed, we may conclude that, for the Knight of Faith, the equanimity of Religiousness A has the same relative significance as does aesthetic enjoyment or ethical choice. The Knight of Faith is not indifferent to everything, in other words, but he has the capacity to retain his equanimity in the face of relative disappointments. This is the significance of the example which immediately follows. If the Knight of Faith were absolutely committed to building the building, he would do everything in his power to get the money. If he does not do so, it is not because he is indifferent to everything but because he is indifferent to this particular project. Because he has commitments which make a difference to him, in other words, he can be indifferent to commitments which do not. Because he embodies the difference, or distinction, between commitments which make a difference to him and those which do not, he has overcome the levelling of the present age and the contradictions of the lower spheres of existence.

With this discussion of the relationship between absolute and relative commitments, we have concluded our discussion of Religiousness B. As we have seen, Religiousness B claims to solve the problem of the present age by giving an individual an absolute commitment which is non-rationalizable. Insofar as an individual has an absolute commitment, she has overcome the levelling of the present age, for she has a distinction between what makes an absolute difference to her and what does not. Insofar as an individual has a non-rationalizable commitment--a commitment which is not directly recognizable--she has overcome the levelling of the present age, for the present age cannot level what it cannot see.

Kierkegaard's thought, then, is systematic and coherent from beginning to end. If we accept his analyses of the problem of the present age and the issues confronting the self, we are hard-pressed to reject his religious resolution of the problem of the present age and the issues confronting the self.

But need we accept these analyses and, by extension, this resolution? Obviously, we cannot answer this question here. Even to begin to do so would require a manuscript at least equal length to the present effort. However, if we cannot answer this question, we can, at least, attempt to

clarify it. In our concluding remarks, we will attempt to clarify some of the questions confronting Kierkegaard's analysis of our culture and our selves. To these remarks we now turn.

CONCLUSION

In the last section of The Sickness Unto Death, Anti-Climacus describes what he calls "The Sin of Abandoning Christianity Modo Ponendo, of Declaring It Falsehood". Anti-Climacus says:

This is sin against the Holy Ghost. The self is here most despairingly potentiated; it not merely casts away from itself the whole of Christianity, but makes it a lie and a falsehood....it denies Christ (that He existed and that He is what He claimed to be) either docetically or rationalistically, so that he either becomes docetically, poetry and mythology which make no claim to reality, or rationalistically, a reality which makes no claim to be divine. In this denial of Christ as the paradox there is naturally implied the denial of everything Christian: sin, the forgiveness of sins, etc. (SUD 255, 262)

As we know from Christian tradition, sin against the Holy Ghost is sin that cannot be forgiven. It is suicide-- in this case, spiritual suicide. For Anti-Climacus, in other words, the person who denies everything Christian has no alternative but a present age life with no possibility of becoming a self, with no possibility of salvation. In denying everything Christian, such a person denies the call in existence, denies the Christian claim that to be a human being is to be confronted with issues the resolution of which makes a human being a self. Such a person denies the possibility and the necessity of absolute qualitative

distinctions in his or her life and lives his or her life in terms of the relative, quantitative distinctions of the present age.

As we have seen throughout all of the preceding chapters, the contrast between living one's life in terms of the relative, quantitative distinctions of the present age and living one's life in terms of absolute, qualitative distinctions-- either unsuccessfully, as in the aesthetic, ethical and Religiousness A spheres of existence or successfully in Religiousness B-- structures the whole of Kierkegaard's thought. Thus, to arrive at some sort of judgement about the truth of Kierkegaard's vision would be to arrive at some sort of judgement about the truth of this fundamental contrast. If we accept the truth of the contrast, Kierkegaard's account of the possibilities which are available to human beings who want to express absolute, qualitative distinctions in their lives is difficult to refute. If we reject the truth of the contrast, it is incumbent upon us to provide an account of the possibilities which are available to human beings which replaces a vision structured by the contrasts between relative and absolute, quantitative and qualitative distinctions, despair and salvation with a different vision all together.

But, with this statement, we can appreciate the magnitude of Kierkegaard's accomplishment. Whether we accept Kierkegaard's vision of our culture, our selves and the issues which confront them or, ultimately, reject it,

we cannot avoid coming to terms with it. As the preceding chapters have attempted to demonstrate, Kierkegaard deserves to take his place alongside those other modern thinkers whose work has set the terms of modern cultural debate and promises to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.