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## **Soren Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Authentic Existence**

John B. Merrell

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"SOREN KIERKEGAARD'S PHILOSOPHY  
OF  
AUTHENTIC EXISTENCE"  
John B. Merrell  
May, 1969

A SENIOR HONORS THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
AT CENTRAL WASHINGTON STATE COLLEGE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS IN PHILOSOPHY  
WITH HONORS

Raeburne S. Heimbeck  

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HONORS ADVISER

**PREFACE**

**TO**

**RAEBURN S. HEIMBECK**

**Professor of Humanities and**

**Director of General Honors Program**

**Central Washington State College**

**This thesis of undergraduate study  
is dedicated with endless respect,  
admiration, and esteem for providing  
the writer the incentive to write it.**

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**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

## Introduction

Before making any attempts at discussing the philosophical and religious doctrines of Soren Kierkegaard, some light, out of necessity must be directed toward an adequate, but short account of this thinker's life history. It would truly be a gross injustice and a foolish undertaking if one were to tackle the thoughts which poured out of Kierkegaard without first mentioning, and rightfully so, the background of this nineteenth century genius. His philosophy is a lived philosophy, blooming forth in response and reaction to the strict Christian upbringing largely attributable to his father's own misfortunes, occurring when he himself was a deprived youth, and stretching to the culmination of Kierkegaard's life which saw his violent attack aimed at the established church for its illegitimate practices and hypocrisy. Therefore, a brief glimpse illustrating the personal development of Kierkegaard is warranted and very crucial; for such a study will not only entertain as well as acquaint the reader with a reasonable preparation for viewing and comprehending his philosophy, but it will, with equal importance, provide for a substantial foundation upon which to properly represent Kierkegaard's attitudes concerning personal authenticity.

Soren Kierkegaard was in no way an ordinary person, for his life span was one filled with peculiarities, misfortunes, tragedies, and a few dashes of pleasure. He took delight

in expressing his compliments to beauty and remained very sensitive and devoted when it came time to directing himself at romance and establishing personal relationships. But the extroverted dynamics of his personality were exceedingly overshadowed by the tormented feelings greatly affecting his inward nature. Kierkegaard was a frail man, haphazardly put together, and having his intelligence far outweigh the rather poor construction of his body. Born in Copenhagen in 1813, he died forty-two years later, seemingly of a paralysis of the spine. In appearance, one could easily tell that he was slightly deformed, because his back was, when closely observed, crooked and out of place. His other bodily features were also badly shaped -- his legs were bent and quite delicate and even spindly looking. Kierkegaard's most distinguished characteristics were his eyes, beautiful and brilliant, and with wonderfully warm expressiveness. Kierkegaard was conscious of his undistributed appearance, and so were others. He devoted endless space in his journals observing how out of tune his body was with his mind; and people and children were later to mock and ridicule him unjustly because of the quarrel that was waged between him and the editor of a popular journal, "The Corsair."<sup>1</sup> His ungodly shape grew more intensified, later producing much irritability and bitterness manifesting themselves in his later years before death. Although his appearance was a personal problem, affecting the attitudes he

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Lowrie, A Short Life of Kierkegaard, (New York, 1961), p. 195.

held toward suffering and religion, he wittingly used such a handicap into a disciplined understanding of himself, which was guided by spiritual insight and determination.

In addition to physical disability, Kierkegaard underwent further anguish by being brought up quite sternly by his father. Having a dominate influence had harmful consequences for Soren as a growing youth; the father submitted his son to live in a gloomy household environment characterized by rigid Christian upbringing. Michael Kierkegaard, out of love for his son, made Soren appreciate the sufferings of Christ as sources of misery; and the religious teachings aimed at Soren were so potent and numerous as to deprive the son of a proper social development.<sup>2</sup> However, as will be described in a moment, even though Soren was to later reflect on the disgusted manner in which the father insanely brought him up, the love he held toward his father never ceased, as witnessed by Soren's dedication of some of his writings to his father. But suffice it to say now that the son's religious acquaintance with Christianity was rejected and scorned just after the time when Father and son had a breach in their relationship.

There did occur pleasurable moments in Soren's childhood, and most notably, they center around the tales of fantasy which were conducted within the home. "Even the strange walks in which the old man would take the little boy about the living room rather than the park, were, by virtue of their imaginative and sparkling dialogue and their precise descriptive comments,

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<sup>2</sup>Lowrie, 1961, p. 44.



a marvelous if fantastic introduction to a life of keen perceptive observation of persons and circumstance. These walks carried father and son in fantasy through both Copenhagen and wonderland, and exerted a tremendous influence on S.K.'s story-telling and his nicety of description."<sup>3</sup> Such home activities and many others like them, produced in Soren a well-developed sense of wit, a deliberate appreciation and likeness for forms of lighthearted play, and a knack for expertly using conversation. These traits would make the most of themselves by being rather noticeable on the outward character of Soren Kierkegaard in later life. His liveliness was charming, both in his writing and in the way his behavior was conducted, for he displayed a constant concern for people of all ages by touching them deeply with his kindness. But this tenderness only contributed to make Kierkegaard more fully aware of the sorrows and melancholy that were a part of his inner nature. It is startling indeed to picture this man as leading an existence of outward gaiety and internal suffering. Furthermore, as Arland Ussher says: "Throughout his life Soren Kierkegaard lived as a man about town, yet led the most exciting inner life ever recorded."<sup>4</sup> As this paper will show, Kierkegaard's tormented inner life expressed itself in writings and journals of an unparalleled nature which came about as the author tried

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<sup>3</sup>Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, Vol. I, (New York, 1962)  
p. 50.

<sup>4</sup>Arland Ussher, Journey Through Dread (New York, 1955)  
p. 38.

desperately to find a meaning of life for himself; and such a meaning was to come only by Kierkegaard's attempts at being the psychologist of his own soul, and this prompted him to seek refuge in what he terms "the radical cure" -- Christianity.

Kierkegaard's youth came to a dramatic conclusion when he had just turned twenty-one and was seriously studying at the university. He appropriately called the event "the great earthquake,"<sup>5</sup> and understandably so, because the son discovered, after carefully analyzing an irrelevant comment said to him by his father, that his father, himself, had been suffering over the thought that he was a lost soul for having cursed God in his own childhood, as a result of being cold, hungry, and lonely. Moreover, by further probing, Soren learned that his father had married the housekeeper out of necessity just after his father's first wife had died. The father believed that the cursing of God and the raping of a woman were sins that would have uncalculated consequences for the entire household; one of which was the fear that he was destined to outlive all seven of his children! This realization was seemingly confirmed in Soren's mind when most of his brothers and sisters did actually die, and after accepting the doom that had apparently hit the family, Soren reacted outrageously by rebelliously slandering both his father, and in a sense, God. By successfully establishing a separation from two fathers, one earthly, the other heavenly, little Kierkegaard wanted nothing to do with

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<sup>5</sup>Alex Dru, The Journals of Kierkegaard, (New York, 1959), p. 39.

the doctrines of Christianity, though understanding them just the same. He now turned to furthering the intellectual side of his nature, by taking a more active part in student activities and by carelessly enjoying the style of life that grew with it. The outcome of this saw Soren live separately from his father and begin to carry on his life in a reckless and hopeless manner.<sup>6</sup>

On May 19, 1838, Soren, now twenty-five, received a religious recovery, which conceivably was a sudden realization over the despairing and meaningless type of life that he had been living. More significantly, this was the day of his father's death, in which the father made a last minute confession to his son, understandably over his past sins, and also made a last plea. The father strongly urged his son to pursue and pass his theological examinations, which would give Soren a step in the right direction to becoming an ordained minister. (Soren did pass his examinations and successfully defended "The Concept of Irony" as his dissertation, but the opportunities to join the clergy and to preach from behind the pulpit were never achieved, for Soren had the credentials which saw instead his attack upon the false teachings of the church's faculty). May 19 was also a day for reconciliation for young Kierkegaard; for he learned and understood that his father's sins had occurred out of love for his son, to give Soren protection. Thus, Soren was drawn closer to once again loving his father

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<sup>6</sup>Lowrie (1961), p. 61.

by the forgiveness of his father's wrongdoings, but Soren had with equal force been reconciled to God. He soon would head a completely devoted Christian existence, which prevented him from marrying a girl he would love and cherish for the remainder of his life.

After easily passing his theological examinations, he met and instantly fell in love with Regina Olson. This event was to violently change the direction of his entire life. The courting period between the two was short, and the love that each had for the other brought forth their engagement. However, their marriage plans were never realized, for Kierkegaard's inner melancholy prompted him to confess to himself that he would be unfit to marry such a girl of divine innocence and beauty; he wished, also, not to bring his torments and sufferings upon her, for they would prevent a marriage of complete open-heartedness.<sup>7</sup> He reasoned, too, that such a thought of marriage was not approved by God, and felt it to be a Divine Veto from Him. Sensing the situation in bitter disappointment and in an utter state of confusion mixed with despair, Kierkegaard decided to break the engagement so as not to inflict any suffering unduly upon her. He immediately fled to Berlin, sent the ring back accompanied with a sincere excuse to apologize for rash actions, and nested in Berlin for a period of six months to start the search for a meaning to his life. Thus began Kierkegaard's literary career. His

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<sup>7</sup>Lowrie (1961), pp. 111-119.

first set of writings resemble love letters in the form of philosophical treatises, and are rightfully called Aesthetic, for they are primarily addressed to Regina, justifying within points of view as represented by pseudonymous authors his real feelings of love for her. Coming to view with equal force but with less popularity, one sees Kierkegaard's personal attitudes and opinions represented and authored by himself and not by fictitious personalities. These are properly called his "Edifying Discourses," which pose answers to the conclusionless aesthetic works; and Christian writings beginning after the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, which illustrates the attempts of Kierkegaard to find a meaning or purpose in life for himself, and for any other needy man. Hence, Regina had made him a "poet," a literary activity that served to present and henceforth to preserve a Christian way of living by presenting Christianity in naked form, isolating it away from both the prejudiced teachings of the clergy and the Hegelian attempts at rationalizing it. "This concern is the magnetic centre around which all other aspects of his thought, life, bitter controversy, and work revolve; by which they are held in position; and from which they derive their final importance."<sup>8</sup> The remaining significant events of Kierkegaard's life include the encounter he had with "The Corsair," an irresponsible journal published in Copenhagen which only gave Kierkegaard more personal suffering

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<sup>8</sup>George E. and George B. Arbaugh, Kierkegaard's Authorship, (Rock Island, Illinois, 1967), p. 22.

because of its characterization of his undeveloped and odd-looking body. Kierkegaard sought to defend the leading people of Denmark against false impressions and accusations stemming from the Corsair and its publisher. The climax of Kierkegaard's life was the attack on and the contempt he held for the Established Church of Denmark, for not correctly representing true Christianity in accordance with the outlines of the New Testament. It is within this period of his life that Kierkegaard became a social activist. He presented his argument in pamphlet form (*The Instant*) and went on busy street corners to anxiously distribute his criticisms to the common man. Kierkegaard's intentions were extremely diversified, and his attack was purposely aimed at first arousing honesty from the clergy by having them confess openly to their sophist attempts at teaching Christianity. However, he received absolutely no response from the clergy, and this prompted him to write more vigorously and to strengthen his accusation with a new breed of violent language. The publication of the pamphlet now sought to arouse the public by impregnating within them the stock revelation that they were not at all Christianly, but only made to believe that they were "Christians" by the clergy who wished to fatten their wallets rather than express the truths of Christianity.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, Kierkegaard's assault on the church was only partially completed, for he suffered a

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<sup>9</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon Christendom*, trans. by Walter Lowrie (Boston, 1956), pp. 77-115.

spinal paralysis which a month later brought on his death.

The reader might be asking himself whether the revealing of Kierkegaard's history has any relevance to Personal Authenticity. The answer will become apparent and obvious when his relationship with Christianity is explained briefly. It centers on his existence as "becoming a Christian," starting right after his broken engagement with Regina Olson, also immediately before the father's death, in which case Kierkegaard was not only united with his father, but he soon was to lead a life which found support and strength in worshipping a new father -- God. "Yet most important for our understanding is the fact that before the authorship commenced Soren Kierkegaard had completed his return to Christianity and had resolved upon a life of religious dedication, a life henceforth unqualified by ambivalence or compromise."<sup>10</sup>

It must be noted before proceeding any further that Kierkegaard's attitudes toward Christianity were never fully appreciated until after his reconciliation with his father. The preconceptions of it preached to him by his father in childhood taught little Kierkegaard to first understand Christianity through fear, or the feeling he received at viewing the crucifixion of Christ represented in art form.<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard, in his later journal entries, refused to believe that a child could have any use for Christianity. As a

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<sup>10</sup>Arbaugh, (1967), p. 22.

<sup>11</sup>Lowrie, (1961), p. 39

university student, he knew and understood the doctrines of Christianity, but refused to accept its premises for fear of its interfering with his intellectual style of life, and also because of his split in the relationship he once enjoyed with his father, which caused a negative attitude toward Christianity. Thus, Kierkegaard's Christianly existence and his complete devotion to it began conceivably from the wild, aimless existence of his intellectual life in which he appeared very much convinced that he had committed the same two unforgiveable sins as did his father; namely, cursing God, occurring in his rebellious breach with his father, and the raping of a girl, happening after Kierkegaard had too much liquor at a neighborhood inn. Moreover, his intense affection for seeking shelter in Christianity also stemmed from the last minute conference held before his father's death, where the latter made confessions to his son to reaffirm the love that had always existed between them; and lastly, Kierkegaard sought Christian refuge in response to the conviction that he was prohibited from realizing the universal, that is, from marrying the girl he loved. He believed that his suffering should not be put upon her; which to his mind would destroy the purity of marriage. Suffice it to conclude then that Kierkegaard entered the Christianly existence as a responsive, motivated reaction to the impact and confrontation that he faced with his personal problems. Such a flight into a strictly religious way of living henceforth determined his thoughts as well as his life.



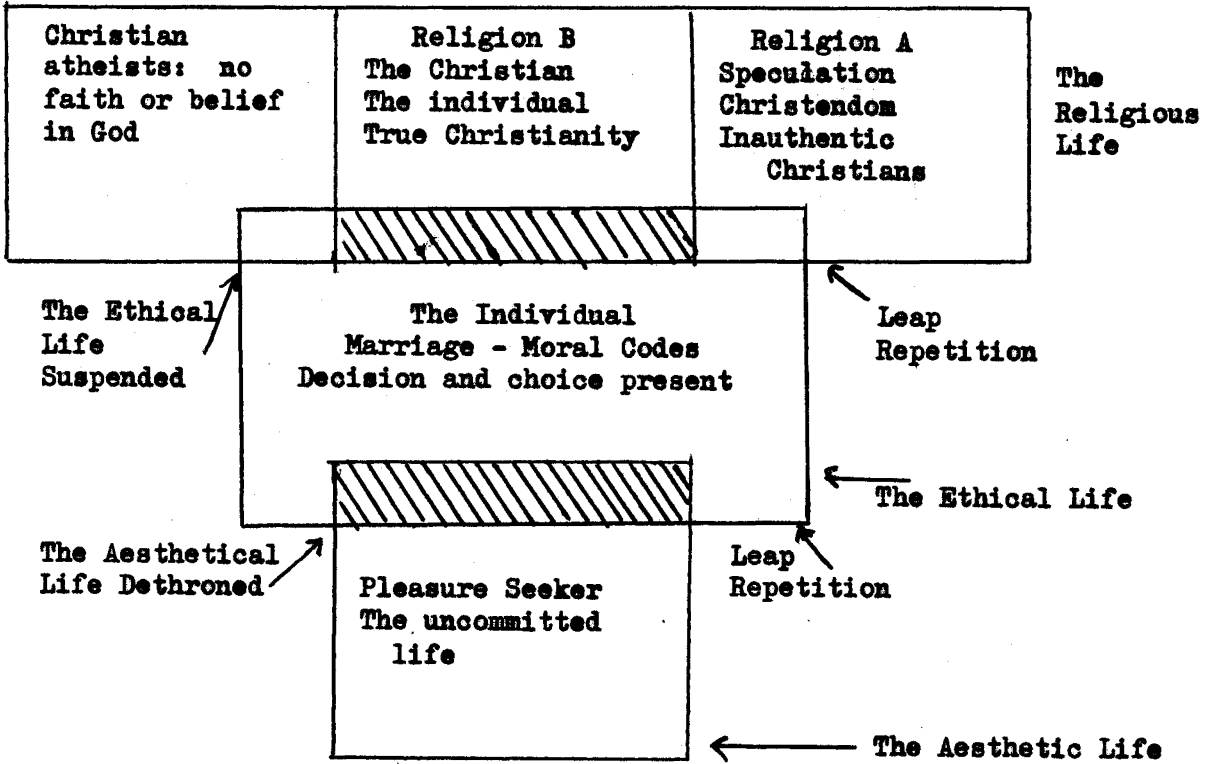
It now appears the right moment to bring to the surface the direction in which this paper will take the reader. As stated above, the underlying theme in Kierkegaard's authorship is his existence as a Christian. This theme starts with his aesthetic-ethical works, and becomes more observable in his later Christian writings. The proper task of this thesis is to explain precisely, in a clear and observable way, the significance of what it means to be a Christian, according to the Kierkegaardian point of view; and the second part of the task is to determine, in the order of importance, just exactly where Kierkegaard's "categories" fit within his Christianly scheme. The categories include such Kierkegaardian notions as "the aesthetical man," "the ethical man," "the religious man," "despair," "subjective truth," "the individual," and finally "the Christian." My job is to define and to relate these "categories" into a hierarchy of human existence; that is to say, my efforts in this thesis will be concerned with constructing a network of human existence, culminating with the "master category" representing the authentic individual par excellence. The authentic individual will then represent the very apex of existence for Kierkegaard.

The conclusion of this introduction will end with some comments on the diagram which follows. The diagram reveals the three spheres of existence which Kierkegaard believes to constitute existence itself -- the aesthetical, the ethical, and the religious. The colored portions represent that amount of existence retainable or dethroned in the next higher form.

DIAGRAM OF PERSONAL AUTHENTICITY

FOR

SOREN KIERKEGAARD



Thus, when one moves from the aesthetical stage to the ethical stage, some of the former is taken into the latter, and the same occurs likewise in the ethical jump to the religious stage. The "leap" means basically the willingness, or the decision to make the choice from one stage to the next higher one.

The Christian atheists constitute the left extreme of the religious sphere of existence. These are the people who are weekly church-goers, who frequently read the Bible, and who willingly sing the hymns; but they nevertheless refuse to believe in a God. At the other extreme is "Christendom," and by this Kierkegaard means not actual Christianity, but the militant ways the clergy is teaching Christianity; "Christendom" comprises everyone who thinks that he is a Christian simply because he is told so by the priests. "Christendom" also represents speculation, or more specifically, Hegel's attempt at systematizing history so as to erase Christianity by rational means. Kierkegaard held that some of the clergy (Professor Martensen) were Hegelians and not by any means priests. They, too, are sophists!

Attention must be focused on the three spheres themselves and on the terms set within each sphere itself. This will promote a better insight as to Kierkegaard's conceptions of existence, and it provides, with equal force, the backbone upon which this thesis will direct itself. A short word must be said on the importance which each sphere represents. The aesthetic sphere is of the lowest value in Kierkegaard's view

of existence, for it is here that the person lives his life just for the sake of living it; there are no decisions or choices coming in it which affect one's life. The aesthetical is only an uncommitted existence leading the aesthete in the direction of despair. The ethical is somewhat higher, and is represented by marriage and the adoption of moral standards governing one's life. The person is an "individual" but of a lesser degree than the individual who is present in the religious sphere. Nevertheless, the ethical individual leads an authentic existence simply by using choice and freedom in guiding his existence; he may even use his will by not accepting religion's value at all. At any rate, he is far above the aesthetic person. The last sphere of existence having more value than the ethical is the religious one. In Kierkegaard's opinion, the religious person has a higher authentic existence than does the ethical man. For a man to enter this sphere, he must do so by ultimately exercising his will to its fullest potential, which means complete obedience to God and to worship Him by faith. The religious person is therefore an "individual," too, but of a different sort from the individual present in the ethical stage. The religious individual is the authentic individual and his authenticity is determined by the highest act of the will, namely faith which personally sets forth, inwardly, his God-relationship. Thus by suffering, by devotion, and by casting all other things aside, the religious-authentic-individual slides into the apex of the religious sphere and becomes the Christian man. In conjunction with the possible attainment

of the Christianly existence, Kierkegaard believes there are three possible ways to reach it: (1) from the aesthetical directly to the religious sphere, (2) by abandoning speculation, i.e. Hegel's system, and (3) by the direct movement through each separate stage caused by a free act of the will.

The diagram shows what this thesis is all about. By using Kierkegaard's major works, the diagram represents in short version just how one can become a Christian if he wills it so; but the thesis will show something of ultimate importance that the diagram does not really portray -- the contention of mine that Soren Kierkegaard was a Christian, and hence the Jesus Christ of his time.

To provide strength to the importance contained within the diagram and to once more give the reader hints as to what is beyond these first pages, I would like to quote some lines from Kierkegaard's Authorship, authored by George E. and George B. Arbaugh, who by their excellent display of language, appropriately show the dynamics and feelings that Kierkegaard held toward each level of existence. "Since for Soren Kierkegaard existence before the God-man is not one among various kinds of existence, but is the one authentic existence, it follows that Christianity must be comprehended within the total framework of life. Christian existence is the culmination of three successive stages wherein, hopefully, one moves from an aesthetic, through an ethical, to a religious way of life; to comprehend Christianity is also to understand the stages. The central thesis of the stages is anti-Hegelian in that if

there is any movement from stage to stage it is never by natural evolution but by free choice. An aesthete is anyone living for the various pleasures of the moment. The ethical man is one who lives energetically in obedience to duty, in the constancy of continuous resolve through time; he seeks to develop the secure value of personal moral character. The religious man is one who despairs of aesthetic pleasure and self-won character, who risks all and secures the eternal by faith."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Arbaugh, (1967), p. 28.

## CHAPTER TWO

## The Aesthetical Life

"It is equally important to recognize that the aesthetic works are not an exaltation of the aesthetic stage but a movement away from it, a fond farewell, and represent the first decisive step in his education in Christianity.

Away from the Aesthetical!"<sup>1</sup>

"Regarded integrally in its relation to the work as a whole (coming at the beginning) the aesthetical production is a deceit, and herein lies the deeper significance of the pseudonyms. A deceit, however, is rather an ugly thing. To this I would respond: Be not deceived by the word 'deceit'! One can deceive a person about the truth, and one can (remembering old Socrates) deceive a person into the truth. Indeed when a person is under an illusion, it is only by deceiving him that he can be brought into the truth."<sup>2</sup>

"But the whole of this aesthetical production was laid claim to by the religious; the religious assented to this evacuation, but it lay in wait for it, as though it would say, 'Are you not nearly finished with this now.' While the poetical production was being brought forth the author was living in decisive religious categories."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, vol. I (New York, 1962), p. 233.

<sup>2</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View, trans. by Lowrie, (New York, 1962), p. 89.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 47

Soren Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthetical way of life, and for that matter, the beginning of his aesthetical works of authorship, grew from his severed relationship with Regina, coming from the belief that he simply was an unfit partner for marriage. Actually, she had been given the false impression that Soren Kierkegaard was a scoundrel, who had merely received her affection with no seriousness behind it. In the public's eye, he was a monster and the public of Copenhagen seemed thoroughly convinced of his behavior as a scoundrel by Kierkegaard's sudden flight to Berlin. Kierkegaard's intense desire to harbor himself in Berlin was based on the melancholy which began to show itself remarkably within his personality. Having the thoughts of his father's sins on his own mind, the same sins which Kierkegaard believed himself to have committed, and feeling utterly lost because he could not marry, he nested in Berlin with pains of despair, bothering him to such a degree as to almost cause insanity and even death. After getting a secure hold on himself and after seriously thinking about the purpose and direction his life must take, he wished to clarify his romantic position toward Regina in such a way that only she would be able to understand.<sup>4</sup> This was accomplished by Soren Kierkegaard when he pseudonymously authored Either-Or, Repetition, and Fear and Trembling, and Stages on Life's Way, each containing within its pages characters which have specifically developed

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<sup>4</sup>Lowrie, Kierkegaard, p. 233.



personalities, representing different points of view as to the importance of dissimilar types of existence, which themselves are conclusionless. Kierkegaard wished Regina to understand his feelings; these falsely authored books are designed to secretly tell her that even though he is faithful to her and loves her dearly, he cannot marry because of the sorrows and sins he carries within him. This is precisely why Kierkegaard says that these books are aimed at "my reader" -- who, in all honesty, is Regina herself; for only she will be clever enough to depict and to recognize the thoughts that are really from Soren Kierkegaard's heart.

These books, also, have another purpose besides being simply literary devices of theatrical quality. Soren Kierkegaard wanted to help others who might be despairing at the meaninglessness of their existence. The pseudonyms employ his reasoning and reflect his feelings but not his conclusions or value commitments; and by presenting alternative points of view within conflicting levels of existence, Kierkegaard was trying by this means to compel the reader to discover the necessity for every man to say, "I"; i.e., to discard the facades of impersonal roles and eventually to declare, "Here I stand." In other words, as Kierkegaard says so many times in his journals, he wished "to deceive people into the truth,"<sup>5</sup> and this was done through Kierkegaard's presentations of

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<sup>5</sup>George E., and George B. Arbaugh, Kierkegaard's Authorship (Rock Island, Illinois, 1967), p. 42.

picture-personalities drawn from opera, literature, and morality, including critical remarks on Hegel's systematic philosophy, all of which culminated in making the reader seriously examine himself by forcing upon him the awareness to choose his own style of life. Human existence becomes meaningful only when the style of life is chosen by freedom, or by a free act of the will, which thereby implies self-determination. To be a human being is to have particular concern about one's self, which to Kierkegaard necessarily involves passions like faith, love, feeling, which enrich existence.<sup>6</sup> The authentic human life is not found in tranquil insight or bliss, but in the responsible and strenuous choice of values, above all in the choice of one's proper self regardless of the buffetings and allurements of experience.<sup>7</sup> Evidence will demonstrate that the aesthetic life has no commitment, no choices or decisions within it, and hence, Soren Kierkegaard believes it to end in utter despair.

Either-Or, edited by the pseudonymous Victor Eremita, is composed of two parts. The "Either" depicts the aesthetical life, while the "Or" stands for the ethical style. The plot of the first part of Either-Or tells of Victor's findings of papers, which are remarkably diverse and truly unified and put in carefully planned sequences. These papers, although written by a young man designated "A", makes him appear

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<sup>6</sup>Johannes Climacus, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. by W. Lowrie (Princeton, 1941), p. 176.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

somewhat sophisticated yet rather melancholy, too. The intention behind the "Either," in short, is to dramatically portray the inevitable pathos of pleasure-seeking. By his use of "indirect communication," that is, the point of view offered by each pseudonymous author which does not represent Soren Kierkegaard's own opinion, Kierkegaard is content with the idea of offering Christianity indirectly by putting it in the terms of the pleasurable which stands the chance of not being rejected by his audience. The aesthetic life and its preference for pleasure over decision is quite representative of Soren Kierkegaard's own experience after the breach with his father, and furthermore, the despair that is a part of this existence is a sickness of the self which Soren Kierkegaard recognized to be horribly affecting him; and he chose to be rid of it by putting himself on the path of becoming a Christian. He posed this problem in this aesthetic work, and offered cures and advice in the "Edifying Discourses" which accompanied it.

The first volume, or the "Either," has the papers of "A" as representing the aesthetical life. The papers reveal the aesthete as the sort of man who desires satisfaction through the clever use of charm and intellectuality. As a refined hedonist, he casts aside beauty and art and desires instead to make himself personally interested in pleasure. Eremita illustrates that the aesthete has his attitude programming his mind by being overly interested in the pleasurable only for the moment, leaving him in what the author calls as the "state of

immediacy." What is actually pursued may be wealth, honor, pleasure, health, or self-expression, none of which lead to a significant moral consciousness or proved to offer a genuine hope of happiness.<sup>8</sup>

The pleasures sought for the moment by the aesthete do not mean that he is totally ignorant of moral consciousness. He sees morality only as a possibility, but is stubbornly unwilling to commit himself to it. "Every aesthetical life view is despair, it was said. This was attributed to the fact that it was built upon what may be and may not be. The aesthetical is that in a man whereby he immediately is the man he is; by this I do not mean to say that the man who lives aesthetically does not develop, but he develops by necessity not by freedom, no metamorphosis takes place in him, no infinite movement whereby he reaches the point from where he becomes what he becomes."<sup>9</sup> Even moral principles themselves receive the aesthete's consideration for he may use them to secure the satisfactions he is seeking in life. What is a central characteristic about him is that he lies and lives outside the ethical and religious categories and views them as a spectator. Being an on-looker, he thus thrives relentlessly in the aesthetical domain, but does not have a true self because he lacks choice and purpose. The aesthete's pleasures do not constitute his goals, for they remain as

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<sup>8</sup>Victor Eremita, Either-Or, Vol. I, trans. by D. Severson, (Princeton, 1944), p. 301.

<sup>9</sup>Victor Eremita, Either-Or, Vol. II, (Princeton, 1944), p. 229.

interests, serving to attract him. Such attraction breeds indifference in his attitude toward the world; wanting lastingness in objects and experiences which are external to his self, the poor aesthete is headed for despair. "For, as I have expounded this in a previous passage dealing with every aesthetical view of life, it is despair to gain the whole world, and to gain it in such a way that one suffers damage to one's soul, and yet it is my sincere conviction that it is a man's true salvation to despair."<sup>10</sup>

As for religious awareness, the aesthete is not wholeheartedly devoid of it either. Thinking about God's salvation can be as interesting as singing the hymns, for not all of the religious tunes are boring or dull. Going to church to hear such things implies that others will be there as well. Hence, religion makes for socialization, and the aesthete is well aware of it. But the aesthete goes there precisely for this reason, to view the audience, and thereby leaving himself uncommitted. For him, the closest existence gets to him is realized again primarily as possibility, or something observable out in left field. He is merely playing with the fruits of his environment and existence as a possibility never becomes an actuality; and therefore, he still lives in a "state of immediacy" where response to his environment is deemed more satisfying than any response given to himself.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

Within "A" 's papers, Eremita also finds out that the aesthete truly leads a life full of meaninglessness and chaos. "Of all ridiculous things, it seems to me the most ridiculous is to be a busy man of affairs, prompt to meals, and prompt to work. Hence when I see a fly settle down in a crucial moment on the nose of a business man, or see him be spattered by a carriage which passes by him in even greater haste, or a tile from the roof falls down and strikes him dead, then I laugh heartily. 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. And so what will the future bring, I do not know, I have no presentiment. My view of life is utterly meaningless."<sup>11</sup> Sometimes within volume two, one can notice distinctive traits that Soren Kierkegaard purposely gives his fictitious author so as to make the latter's opinions directly relevant and sarcastic to the Hegelian System. The aesthete is pictured destroying and obliterating alternative ways of life, not by speculation but by a higher madness. "Philosophy turns toward the past, towards the whole enacted history of the world, it shows how the discrete factors are fused in a higher unity, it mediates and mediates; it seems to me to give no answer at all to the question I put to it, for I ask about the future."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Victor Eremita, Either-Or, Vol. I, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup>Victor Eremita, either-Or, Vol. II, p. 174

The aesthete, because of his passive insistence in continually reaping the pleasures of the world, is faced with an either-or, concerning his choosing and not choosing. That is, he must choose or decide not to choose the despair which is ultimately wrecking his life. Unlike the ethical man who has an either-or of bad or evil, the aesthete must rather move toward salvation by recognizing the despair which issues from an indecisive or uncommitted life. If he accepts the challenge, he will despair at seeing the hopelessness of his situation; but such a recognition of despair can lead hopefully to a recovery. This is accomplished because despair, or the relating of oneself to one's true self, really makes the aesthete face himself, and makes him thus personally confront the tragic direction in which his life is going. He will then choose to give himself some type of eternal significance after analyzing his despairing condition. "As soon as one can get a man to stand at the crossways in such a position that there is no recourse but to choose, he will choose the right."<sup>13</sup> As for the man who chooses not to choose, his despair will deepen and increase with his pleasures until the latter runs dry. "By living their lives outside of themselves, they outline themselves, and they vanish like shadows and they are already in a state of dissolution before they die. They therefore never have a conception of what the (true) self is, and it would be of very little use to a man if he were to

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 172

gain the whole world and lose himself."<sup>14</sup> In a shorter stated way, it's Either pleasure and a futile human life, Or, it's despairing, thus stimulating within the person the discovery of the enslavement that pleasure brings in life, which prepares the person to embark on a new life of freedom and responsibility. To make this point clear about the ultimatum, or the either-or which faces the aesthete, I rely on Victor Eremita's language again. "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 that he chooses? He chooses himself in his eternal validity." In conclusion, then, despair is the end product for the aesthete, but it can lead to redemption, only if one truly and authentically does despair. To validate this true despair, one chooses himself by a sort of ethical decision. Mere despair has no value by itself; what is most valuable is to choose oneself while despairing.

The aesthete in Kierkegaardian terms is quite human, represents a philosophy of life or of existence, and his desires for pleasures are rationally conceived and structured. But the point that Kierkegaard would like to make the reader realize is that such a hedonistic style of life prohibits man from making genuine choices and from even finding a meaning in his life. This is essentially the thesis behind

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 173.



the Either. From the sensuality of Don Juan to the seducer's coldly reflective and calculating quest for pleasure, Kierkegaard vainly tried to portray the eventual outcome of all aesthetical living whatever form it takes.<sup>15</sup> "The outcome is always the same -- a passionate search for worldly satisfactions which, unhallowed by dedication, leaves a hollow void which tempts one to bitterness."<sup>16</sup> Kierkegaard tried also to show that the aesthetic existence does certainly have its place in life, but it must not occupy all of one's life. "The aesthete whether as a sex fiend or debauched person, soon loses the pleasure which he seeks and perhaps loses his life as well. The conclusion is that aesthetic interest is an essential and necessary ingredient of existence, but neither a proper nor rewarding goal for it."<sup>17</sup>

Traces of the aesthetical can be equally found in Repetition, another fictitious work authored by Constantine Constantius. It too, is really a love letter dedicated to Regina, but of a different sort. Either-Or was written to not only clarify secretly to her that he was not just a thief who stole her affections, but it aimed at repulsing Regina from him and to give her a religious healing, which is what "eremita" signifies. After nodding her head to him in church, Kierkegaard thought her to be anything but repulsive and disgusting toward him. It was plain to him that she had not received the hidden messages contained in Either-Or justifying his reason for not wishing to

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<sup>15</sup> The Diary of the Seducer, which concludes the "Either."

<sup>16</sup> Arbaugh, (1967 Rock Island, Illinois) p. 73.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

marry her. He again fled to Berlin, and this time composed Repetition to once more explain his point of view regarding his abnormal conduct and sorrows and to try "to set her afloat." Beneath this intensesness of Kierkegaard's to repel her, he thought of attracting her by which they would be reunited through a "repetition,"<sup>18</sup> or a spiritual rebirth, involving the recovery of love that comes from an overhauling of the self. That is; the self gains a continual re-committment of itself by having its new self grasp the ideals of the former old self; this makes the past have meaning and the future does not become a hollow dream. At any rate, Kierkegaard had vainly hoped for a reconciliation with Regina, but before the book itself was complete, Regina had already become engaged to another, namely Fritz Schlegel. Receiving the news with shock, yet with happiness, Kierkegaard had to radically change the conclusion of the book from a reconciliation to a rapprochement with her. "Repetition" means a rebirth of old values from within. Spiritual rebirth signifies that the "God-is-dead" notion becomes revitalized giving it a new value in the hearts of men. For the individual the proper self is given a Godly-rebirth, when the self is restored to its wholeness.

Within Repetition, it is observable that Kierkegaard treats his love affair in a new recreated setting having characters display their points of view behind the direction of a pseudonymous author. He ingeniously shows the valuelessness of the

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<sup>18</sup> Vigilius Haufniensis, The Concept of Dread, Trans. by W. Lowrie, (Princeton, 1944) p. 16.

aesthetic way of living by having the lover enjoying memories and thoughts more than he enjoys his beloved. Fleeing in shame, and having a sense of worthlessness, he seeks to find a new meaning for his life. As with the "Either," Repetition finds the aesthetic life grounded in boredom, fully related to the temporal, and participating in the momentary. The aesthete needs no repetition for it will be of no benefit to him.

"Gay moments flee away, pleasures are but for the moment and pains endure too long. While time holds promise of good things to come, it carried one inexorably towards privation, old age and death. There is no hope for enduring value in duration. Only in the repetition which defies time is there a possible salvation, and a successful repetition of such magnitude as this is an introduction of the quality for the eternal."<sup>19</sup> The aesthetical repetition ends with despair because of its circumstantial roots. It views the ethical and religious repetitions only as possibilities and not as actualities; authentic repetition must come inwardly, and with free commitment. But to Kierkegaard, "repetition" is really authentic only within the religious commitments one has for God. The ethical repetition is likewise only a possibility. God is the only power who can heal the broken self so as to give it integrity and wholeness. "But it remains the case that with the aesthete, repetition leaves him standing in the temporal, and for that reason, the future is hopeless, because the aesthete

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<sup>19</sup>Constantine Constantius, Repetition, trans. by W. Lowrie (Princeton 1941, New York, 1964) p. 65.

seeks support in tangible things."<sup>20</sup> Thus, the aesthete has not realized himself in position to the eternal. "He who would only hope is cowardly, he who would only recollect is a voluptuary, but he who wills repetition is a man, and the more expressly he knows how to make his purpose clear, the deeper he is a man."<sup>21</sup> The aesthete's sin is that he loses the eternal within the temporal, and he will not be a person simply because he will not become one. He prefers the moment instead of willing a repetition for the eternal in his future.

In Stages on Life's Way, the gloominess of the aesthetic life is once more quite vivid, and understandably so, because Kierkegaard brings five speakers, all aesthetes, together and has each participating in what is called a fantastic banquet. The common relationships between them are that each holds to a worldly view of woman and the other is that each is a sharply defined personality. "The Young Man comes closest to being merely a possibility, and therefore he is still a hopeful case. This is essentially melancholy of thought. Constantine Constantius is case-hardened understanding. Victor Eremita is sympathetic irony. The Fashion Tailor is demoniac despair in passion. Johannes the Seducer is perdition in cold blood, a 'marked' individuality in whom life is extinct. All are consistent to the point of despair."<sup>22</sup> These pseudonymous characters are the "Either," who wish to search for pleasures, though they are fully aware of the "Or," or ethical choice. The "Or" is the choice none of them accept because to accept it means

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<sup>20</sup>Constantius, p. 136.

<sup>21</sup>Constantius, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup>Climacus, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 264.

that they must choose -- which is exactly what each tries to avoid. They would prefer to remain irresponsible by continuously dallying in pleasure. The aesthetes are fully human, are not ignorant of values, but exist only in the moment, enjoying that which presents itself rather than setting deliberate goals for themselves.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, they will not go into a more demanding realm of existence. The closest that the aesthetes can come to an Either-Or is in the words of Victor Eremita: "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."<sup>24</sup>

In summary, the Stages, with its five aesthetes makes very clear the notion that is central behind the aesthetical life -- that even though it produces a consciousness toward beauty and charm, the aesthetical life necessarily leads to boredom and to a pathos. Moreover, the pathos lies precisely in the inability of the aesthetical to satisfy man as spirit, Kierkegaard brings this to the surface when fleeting kisses, products of the moment, are compared to eternal vows of love, which are eternal. "Two loving souls vow that they will love each other in all eternity -- thereupon they embrace, and with a kiss they seal this eternal pact. Now I ask any thinking person whether he would have hit upon that! . . . The most spiritual is expressed by the very

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>24</sup>Eremita, Either-Or, Vol. I, p. 37.

opposite and the sensual is to signify the most spiritual. What could be less eternal than a kiss."<sup>25</sup> The sensuous life surely is delightful, but its tragedy is that it leads to an uncommitted life, which necessarily makes it pathetic. In addition to its uncommitted nature, the aesthetical has no profound sense of selfhood and tends to destroy life by leading it to unworthy goals; and even though it is human existence nevertheless, involving rational reflection and selective enjoyment, with a view given to the world giving purpose and order, it remains clear, "that there is no natural development of this life into a higher (moral or religious) existence. Movement to the higher stages can come only by a dethroning of the aesthetic in a decisive act."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Helarius Bookbinder, Stages on Life's Way, trans. by W. Lowrie, (Princeton, 1940) p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> Arbaugh, Kierkegaard Authorship, p. 195.

## CHAPTER THREE

## The Ethical Life

"The ethical individual knows himself, but this knowledge of his is not mere contemplation, for in this the individual is envisaged as determined by necessity (he is what he is); it is rather a reflection upon oneself which is at the same time an act (to become what one is), and hence I have deliberately used the expression 'to choose oneself', instead of 'to know oneself.' The individual has not done with the affair in the fact that he knows himself; on the contrary, this knowledge is fruitful in the highest degree, out of this knowledge issues the true individual."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lowrie, Kierkegaard, Vol. I, p. 244.

In the preceding chapter, the uncommitted life of pleasure was shown to bring with it eventual despair. Volume Two of Either-Or urges duty and responsibility, both of which are characteristics of the ethical life. In addition, instead of the aesthete being ruled by externality, the ethical man is higher in existential importance in that he rules himself from within, or from inwardness, necessarily implying choice or decision. The aesthetic man gives up his life to the temporal, or to the moment, enjoying what he can when he can; to the contrary, the ethical man posits part of himself both in the temporal and in the eternal. That is to say, the ethical man is not concerned with ordinary morality: if he were, he then would be no better off than the aesthetical man who, too has a moral code. For the ethical life to have authentic value, it must contain something more than just moral consciousness; the ethical life must be the kind of existence which a man has when he consciously chooses to transform universal moral principles into his own fixed values and standards. In clear terms, to be ethical is thus much more than to be moral within the usual sense of that word; it consists in accepting one's responsibilities under the sovereignty of God. The ethical life therefore has implicit religious significance, because the morality of the ethical man is of a higher sort. "So when all has become still around one, as solemn as a starlit night, when the soul is above in the world, then there appears before one, not a



distinguished man, but the eternal Power itself."<sup>2</sup> To fully realize himself, the ethical man must attain his stature by standing before God, and in doing so, "validates the eternal of his being."<sup>3</sup>

The central protagonist of the "Or" is Judge William, and Victor Eremita has him exemplifying an entire philosophy of life. As a happy worker, who loves life, who is a responsible and dedicated citizen enjoying everything from making friendships to talking patriotically about his country, the Judge stands as a complete opposite from the rebellious, self-seeking personality of the aesthete. The former talks of marriage as truly representative of the ethical life, while love was the desire motivating the aesthete. Marriage, in effect, is actually transcended love, where the latter is transformed into its fullest. The glory of marriage consists in its relation to God, as a gift from Him.

Under his pseudonym, Soren Kierkegaard wishes to defend marriage as an example of duty in its purest form. That is, he wanted marriage justified not from the angle of pleasure-seeking, but from a perspective of disciplined duty. "As when one marries for money, or from jealousy, or for prospective advantage, because there are good prospects of her dying soon -- or that she may live long and prove to be a blessed branch which bears much fruit, so that by her one may sweep into one's pocket the inheritance of a whole series of uncles and aunts. This

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<sup>2</sup>Eremita, Either-Or, Vol. II, p. 184.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 270.

sort of thing I prefer not to dwell upon."<sup>4</sup> Marriage and its goodness rests on a responsible act and on the duty to make love something more valuable and hence, distinguishable from lust. Since marriage is before God, the imperative need is to welcome the prompting of God within the finite life. Thus, what makes the ethical man truly ethical and manly is by the conduct governing his life and by the values that direct his life. One such set of values has its roots within the aesthetical. Soren Kierkegaard believed the choice of entering into the ethical from the aesthetical will not wholly destroy the latter but only dethrone it. Hence, married love, as dutiful has aesthetical value in that the experience of love's beauty is not totally destroyed by duty itself. The aesthetic experience is not an evil in itself, but instead, since it is an experience, it can be carried over to the ethical where it purifies marriage making it even more blessed. Soren Kierkegaard wittingly illustrates the fact that a maiden may be charming, but as a wife and mother, she will grow in beauty. The aesthetic experience can lend contentment to the ethical, thereby contributing to the latter's potential and realization. "Talent is beautiful only when it is transfigured as a call, and existence is beautiful only when everyone has a call."<sup>5</sup> What the author seriously means is that only the ethical man can live a pleasurable life; he does so by placing his pleasure-seeking drives in a subordinate relationship to his

<sup>4</sup>Eremita, Vol. II, p. 89.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

higher values. To the ethical man, this is essential and desirable, for it makes life an art worth living. "To be the one man is not in itself anything so great, for that everybody has in common with every product a nature, but to be that in such a way that he is also the universal man is the true art of living."<sup>6</sup> However, to have a true art of living is not to confuse the values one has toward himself in relation to say the group's values. The universal is not intended to be in reference to the group as such, but only refers to the art of living which is lived by the self.

Though the ethical life is of higher value to the person than the aesthetic, the ethical man, too, has despair within his life. It was mentioned before that the aesthete had despair by living only for the moment, but the pathos of the moral life is despair over the inability to become one's proper self.<sup>7</sup> Soren Kierkegaard purposely constructed the "Or" in such a way as to leave open a proper consideration for the religious sphere of existence. This religious sphere is formally called by Kierkegaard as "imminent religion," which is designed to provide salvation for the ethical since it grows out of the ethical experience. Examples of ethical despair, marking man's failure to attain his goals, are errors of moral judgment, or disillusionment over the inability to successfully measure up to ideals, and even conflicts arising between

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>7</sup>Anti-Climacus, Sickness Unto Death, ed. by S. Kierkegaard trans. by W. Lowrie, (Princeton, 1941) p. 190.

one's conscience and public morality. These are only some of the avenues by which an ethical man may be driven to despair; I mention these for they serve as insights into the problems which Soren Kierkegaard was having within himself and with society as a whole. Thus, the ethical man might be inwardly sick because of his wisdom flourishing in duplicity. He, therefore, is failing to "will the one thing," namely the Good (God), which comes from a "purity of heart." Willing of the Good comes not from duplicity, or "double-mindedness" (worldliness), but from single-mindedness, or from inwardness, or a deepening of one's self, which in truth, "wills only the Good."<sup>8</sup> Thus, 'purity of heart' is to will one thing and to be one thing, but to will one thing could not mean to will the world's pleasure and what belongs to it. "It is certain and acknowledged by all, that each one who in truth wills the Good, is not in the world in order to conjure up an appearance of the Good, thus winning approval in the eyes of the world and becoming a man who is beloved by all. He has not the task of changing the Good into a thing of the moment, into something that shall be voted upon in a noisy gathering, or something that swiftly gains some disciples who also will the Good up to a certain degree."<sup>9</sup> Ethical despair can be cured by having the ethical despairer aware of the "Good" by repentance; Soren Kierkegaard adheres to

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<sup>8</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart Is To Will One Thing, trans. by Douglas Steere (New York, 1961), p. 104.

<sup>9</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart, p. 145.

the view that "ethical despair can lead to salvation by having the individual believe in God's saving power, even though God's power to save can not be personally grasped or understood; faith in the eternal (or God) is enough to 'validate one's being,' or to cure the sickness of the spirit."<sup>10</sup> The solution of ethical despair can only be found, hence, in a person-to-person relation between God and the penitent, at a new level of existence though within the same, ethical sphere; this new relation is formed and established from within by faith.

When reading Soren Kierkegaard's account of ethical despair, one must exercise great caution in interpreting it; a careful examination of ethical despair will reveal a contention of mine concerning the authenticity of the ethical man himself. Kierkegaard<sup>1</sup> said many times, especially in Purity of Heart and The Concluding Unscientific Postscript, that sinfulness requires inward grounding; that is, it requires the individual to feel that before God, he is always in the wrong, and the feeling of always being in the wrong is sanctioned inwardly or confirmed inwardly by faith. But faith, like the conception of God, is a paradox to the individual, a paradox which is grasped only by faith. "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."<sup>11</sup> In this manner, while the ethical

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<sup>10</sup> Eremita, Either-Or, Vol. 2, p. 213.

<sup>11</sup> Anti Climacus, Sickness Unto Death, p. 162.

consciousness of despair culminates in an awareness of duty to God, via faith, this type of faith remains a duty rather than a religion, which is a temporal God-relationship (as it was for Kierkegaard himself). Ethical consciousness completes itself when guilt before God has, as its remedy, faith. "When freedom then fears guilt, it is not that it fears to recognize itself as guilty, if it is guilty, but it fears to become guilty, and therefore so soon as guilt is posited, freedom comes back again as repentance."<sup>12</sup> Repentance, as a duty to God, is the final form of ethical consciousness and Kierkegaard introduces it in the "Ultimatum," the last portion of the "Or," as the most proper way of correctly guiding the moral life. It is unfair to say that the religious existence is brought to view; Kierkegaard's intentions are to have the ethical man face God dutifully, and not any religious existence. Facing God by repentance is unique because the individual is measured by an absolute standard signaling man's guilt, that whatever he does the doing is always in the wrong. God's intrusion deepens the moral crisis, because the ethical man realizes that when the moral law is broken, it is broken in the eyes of God; to break the moral code is to break the moral code of God.

It is my belief that Kierkegaard strenuously tries to put repentance with a firm foundation only within the ethical life. Repentance is surely a religious consciousness but it does not necessarily lead to a religious way of life. Repentance is

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<sup>12</sup> Haufniensis, Concept of Dread, p. 97.

designed only to give the ethical life good direction, so as to not have it lived without value, like the aesthetic life. Repentance implies that some confidence is put toward noticing God; that is, the individual is sorrowful over his wrong doings, but puts only so much trust in his allegiance to God. Furthermore, repentance becomes the ultimate in the ethical man's response to God, and it is my belief that the ethical man can go no higher within the ethical category, for he does not need to; and I feel positive in saying that Kierkegaard would call the repented ethical man "an individual," who leads a somewhat authentic existence. The ethical man would be deserving of the name "individual" not only for his "dutiful inwardness," a personal feeling within the self for choosing to repent, but also from a decision to bring God into unison with the moral life. In other words, the ethical life does indeed have the foundation in God because to Kierkegaard a moral command implies a giver of the law, and thus it gains the weight of the eternal and a sense of the holy. But what remains clear is that the moral man's or the ethical man's essential religious relationship is to the law and not to God. The individual who pays tribute to God, then, is an individual because "he personally relates himself to God;" but he is not an authentic individual who is leading an authentic existence. As this paper will later show, to be an authentic individual means one has to be "qualified" and even determined to risk everything within the religious sphere; to be an authentic individual requires that one

shall enter the religious sphere of existence instantaneously resulting from a divine act of the will; a divine atonement which man accepts but certainly does not achieve by means of his faith. To reveal a few of the requirements of the religious sphere, it entails a positive leap of faith and purity of heart. But the criterion is much wider, and it will be kept hidden now so as to not destroy the later significance of this paper's conclusion; there it will be plainly evident that Kierkegaard was not only a "religious 'individual'," but a "Christian" as well.

Space in the ethical realm of existence has room also for another conception of what Kierkegaard would call an "individual." It was stated above that an "individual" was one who "personally related himself to God" by repentance and by a sheer act of the will. However, an individual, who by his subjectivity or his inwardness, being his source of truth, could also will himself not to be related in any way to God. That is, should the ethical man take a stand and deliberately choose to have nothing to do whatever with any Godly notions, he too would be an "individual." As Johannes Climacus says in The Concluding Unscientific Postscript: "The ethical is, on the contrary, a correlative to individuality, and that to such a degree that each individual apprehends the ethical essentially only in himself." What is important here are the inner feelings of the person as he personally forms them for himself; the self as grounded in subjectivity, which is truth, may resolve itself to reject any religious intrusions."<sup>13</sup> Denouncing Christianity was to Kierkegaard not a way of

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<sup>13</sup>Climacus, p. 277.



showing one's contempt for it, though it might be conceived that way; to decide within oneself not to partake of the doctrines of Christianity meant the ability that one has for taking a stand. In Kierkegaard's time, people were flocking to the churches just because it was the thing to do, and these same people appeared to be attending church for no earthly reason other than not wishing to wreck their attendance records every Sunday. Therefore, Kierkegaard leaves plenty of room open in his religious convictions for those who are not religiously inclined. The decision of the self in refusing to adhere to religiousness inevitably means something to the individual, conceivably stemming from a "Know Thyself" Socratic judgment which is resolved within the person himself. The Postscript purposely has the contention that the "man who in inward honesty commits himself to objective error (as a false God) is existentially closer to the truth than the man who knows the objective truth but lacks commitment to it. In the former case there is at least the integrity stemming from obedience to the claim of the eternal, even though that claim is poorly comprehended, while in the latter instance there is no movement whatsoever towards proper personhood."<sup>14</sup> The task of becoming subjective, then, may be presumed to be the highest task, and one that is proposed to every human being; correspondingly, the highest reward for true eternal happiness exists only for those who are subjective; or rather, it comes into being for the individual who becomes subjective. "Existing subjectively

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<sup>14</sup>Arbaugh, p. 33.

with passion (and objectively it is possible to exist only in distraction) is in general an absolute condition for presuming to have any opinion about Christianity. Everyone who does not wish to exist so, but who nevertheless desires to concern himself about Christianity, whoever he may be, however great he may be in other respects, is in this manner essentially a fool."<sup>15</sup>

In short, the person, through valid subjectivity, who prefers not to enter any religiousness would be justified in doing so; the reason is that since subjectivity is truth, it follows that "the truth which edifies is truth for you." "For one may have known a thing many times and acknowledged it, one may have willed a thing many times and attempted it; and yet it is only by the deep inward moments, only by the indescribable emotions of the heart, that for the first time you are convinced that what you have known belongs to you, that no power can take it from you; for only the truth which edifies is truth for you."<sup>16</sup> Lastly, the individual of this sort who found within his heart, the need to reject religion completely or even partially, would be "a particular individual," and like Kierkegaard would be an "exception to the universal."

Repentance then is the ultimate form of the ethical, and though it does not necessarily lead to the religious existence, it can, however, set the stage for such consideration for the latter's entrance. For the man wishing to enter the

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<sup>15</sup> Climacus, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 146 and 249.

<sup>16</sup> Eremita, Either-Or, Vol. II, p. 356.

religious, which comes by a divine willed act and by a leap of faith, the ethical man must beforehand, create something within himself to make himself ready for the religious. Thus "something" is appropriately termed "repetition." Repetition is the catalyst by which one prepares for God's grace by choosing himself absolutely. Ethical despair is ended when reliance on the self becomes a self-reliance on God. This repetition, which is a spiritual rebirth in the process of one's becoming, occurs within the ethical despairingness enabling the ethical man to realize the religious sphere of existence as a possibility for the salvation of his sickness. It becomes an actuality when the repetition produces a Person-to-Person relationship, where the eternal is grounded within the person by way of faith. After placing oneself in the religious sphere and after recognizing the despair within the ethical, faith prepares the way for authentic selfhood; and the spiritual task is to grasp the eternal in time. Out of this a plausible conclusion would be that "repetition" is central to all human existence, because it has value in the aesthetical life in making the aesthete realize his worthlessness; and it has value for the ethical man when despair haunts him within his life. If repetition has a decisive effect on the ethical man, it will be shown that the truly authentic religious man leads a dangerous life, as well as a risky one. For among other things, belief in the eternal, which is belief in God, defies reason and even becomes a paradox and an offense to the religious person. Kierkegaard takes great pains in establishing how true Christianity is both

paradoxical and offensive, and how the religious life is marked by suffering, dread, and love for God. "The religious life is risky and demanding, and the eternal lays out only a small piece at a time, in instant after instant luring man onward and upward with the severity of insecurity but also with gentleness of hope."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Works of Love, translated by D. Swenson, (Princeton, 1946, and New York, 1962) p. 237.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## The Religious Life

Faith is: "The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation (which accounts for it) that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but (consists in the fact) that the relation relates itself to its own self."<sup>1</sup>

Faith is precisely this paradox, that the individual as the particular is higher than the universal, is justified over against it, is not subordinate but superior -- yet in such a way be it observed, that it is the particular individual who, after he has been subordinated as the particular to the universal, now through the universal becomes the individual who as the particular is superior to the universal, the fact that the individual as the particular stands in our absolute relation to the absolute.<sup>2</sup>

" 'The individual' -- that is the decisive Christian category, and it will be decisive for the future of Christianity."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anti-Climacus, edited by Soren Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes de Silentio, Fear and Trembling, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Second of Two Notes on 'The Individual,' Point of View, p. 133.

To fully appreciate the religious opinions of Soren Kierkegaard, and to adequately understand his struggle within the religious sphere of existence, itself, there is really no finer place to begin than with his Fear and Trembling, which is pseudonymously authored by Johannes de Silentio. This book, like its sequel, Repetition, concerns Kierkegaard's relationship with Regina, which was broken prior to the completion of these works. Kierkegaard says that Fear and Trembling and Repetition were aimed at "my reader," or "that individual," and by these words, he meant Regina. In addition to justifying secretly to her the impression of being a scoundrel, who merely wanted her affections, these books represent the religious awakening which ultimately prompted him to seriously consider the thought "of becoming a Christian." In fact, the religious awakening and his subsequent yearning for the Christian life were actually predetermined for him primarily as a result of Regina's engagement to another man. "To set her afloat" was a thought that he desperately wanted to come true; however, when it did actually occur, it bitterly stunned his ego and made clear to him then and there that his life was no longer an "either-or." Repetition's meaning partially concerns his hope of vainly getting Regina back, and Fear and Trembling displays rather vividly the sacrifice that Kierkegaard had to make despite his love for her. "This book is concerned principally with Abraham in his relation to Isaac -- first as the expression of the paradox of faith, faith in the incredible or by virtue of the absurd (that he would receive Isaac back)

and second as a prerogative instance of an exception to the universal (in the fact that he was prepared to kill Isaac at God's command.)"<sup>4</sup> Though these masterpieces, especially Fear and Trembling, were designed to repel Regina as well as attract her, Kierkegaard's life destiny became significantly clear to himself after he had heard of her romantic attachment to another; and truly his life would henceforth be one filled with plenty of fear and trembling. Repetition's conclusion had to be dramatically reconstructed in light of Regina's engagement, for the hope that Kierkegaard cherished now was one of "rapprochement." It is interesting to note that "repetition" held spiritual importance for this despairing man, and it signified "freedom" and the chance to become himself by partaking on a religious road of existence. As Kierkegaard says himself: "She is engaged . . . I am again myself, . . . here I have the repetition . . . Is not this then a repetition? Did I not receive again everything double? Did I not recover myself again, precisely in such a way that I must feel doubly the significance of it?"<sup>5</sup> His spiritual "repetition" instantly gave to him a religious conversion, which made him pursue, wholeheartedly, a Christianly existence of intense devotion. Walter Lowrie, the major translator of Kierkegaard's works of authorship, notes the effects that this "repetition" had for Kierkegaard.

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<sup>4</sup>Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, Vol. I, p. 264.

<sup>5</sup>Constantine Constantius, Repetition, p. 16.

"Since Kierkegaard feels that repetition is not merely an object of contemplation, but is the task of freedom, is freedom itself (which is consciousness raised to the second power); that it is the special 'interest' of metaphysics, and at the same time the interest upon which metaphysics founders, that it is the solution of every ethical point of view, the 'conditio sine qua non' of every dogmatic problem, that the true repetition is eternity, although it is true that when it is followed so far that it vanishes from the eye of psychological research as a transcendental fact, as a religious movement in virtue of the absurd, he hints at the relation of 'repetition' to transcendency, and so sets it in opposition to imminence and mediation. Repetition is the aim of freedom in its highest form, for it ensures continuity (personal identity) in the midst of change. We learn also that 'repetition is the decisive expression for that which corresponds to remembrance as conceived by the Greeks . . . the same movement, but in the opposite direction . . . by which one comes into eternity forwards' -- instead of remembering oneself backwards into eternity, which was the way Socrates realized his immortality."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, Kierkegaard's inward attitudes toward "repetition," or this spiritual rebirth, prompted him with the incentive to embark upon a religious life of existence, and his Christianly opinions of Christianity itself were the product of the education he personally received as his pseudonymous works grew in number. And because they grew, his fictitiously authored writings began to speak with more boldness and character, serving to explain both his critical reaction to Hegelian Idealism in its attempts at rationalizing Christianity, and his ultimate attack upon the Established Church, in which he courageously cursed and denounced the clergy for not correctly teaching Christianity according to the guidelines of the New

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<sup>6</sup>Lowrie, p. 260.



Testament. I have picked Fear and Trembling because it will enable the reader to sympathetically feel the radical rebelliousness that flowered from within the soul of Soren Kierkegaard. A short discussion of the book will show the religious feelings of Kierkegaard himself, even though the book is pseudonymously authored and typically aesthetic. After briefly touching upon Fear and Trembling, it will be understood why Kierkegaard said, "Away from the Aesthetical," as one way "of becoming a Christian;" the other way is "Away from Speculation!" which summarizes Kierkegaard's reaction to the popular philosophy of (Hegelianism) that had been outrageously fused with Christianity. "Away from Speculation" is the response in which he speaks more assuredly and confidently of Christianity's doctrines as he actually conceives of them. This is found in his Philosophical Fragments, and most notably, in his Concluding Unscientific Postscript, where the pseudonyms are found to be accompanied by his own real name as editor. Lastly, with all of this background and with the preliminary history of Kierkegaard's use of "indirect communication," it will become evident that Kierkegaard not only became a "Christian" martyr, but, with equal force, became exactly what the age demanded!

Fear and Trembling illustrates the genius of Kierkegaard and shows him as also being philosophically and religiously at his best. He seeks to analyze faith and religion in lieu

of the rational philosophic systems which had distorted theology by successful rationalization. Kierkegaard, therefore, was fully aware of the philosophic schemes of Descartes, and he could not hold his contempt for such men at their attempts for rationally and logically proving God's existence. However, he saw that the enemy was not Descartes but rather the Hegelians. Kierkegaard had perceived very early that the conception of faith which these philosophers shared with the ordinary man was entirely inadequate. "What Schleier Macher calls 'religion' and the Hegelian dogmatists call 'faith' is at bottom nothing else but the first immediacy, the requisite for everything -- the vital fluid -- the atmosphere we breathe in a spiritual sense -- and which therefore cannot rightly be indicated by these words. In that way faith comes into rather simple company with feeling, mood, idiosyncrasy, etc." <sup>7</sup> So, Kierkegaard undertook the enormous task of writing Fear and Trembling with the intention of not only justifying faith, but also, within that justification, to establish poetically to Regina that he was not the scoundrel he pretended to be. This was accomplished by their relationship analogous to the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac.

Within himself, Kierkegaard searched for a legitimate excuse to justify the fact that he could not willingly marry

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<sup>7</sup>Alexander Dru, The Journals of Kierkegaard, (New York, 1959), p. 110.

Regina, and he posed the problem in this way: "Is there such a thing as a teleological suspension of the ethical -- that is, can the universal maxims of morality be suspended by the pursuit of a particular and indicated by God?"<sup>8</sup> Though marriage is considered by Kierkegaard to be a universal ethical rule, he also feels that this ethical rule can be rightly violated if the meaning of religious faith is brought in. By the intrusion of faith, Kierkegaard cunningly attacks a premise of the Hegelian system, which insists that the individual must always submit himself to universal ethical rules. Furthermore, Kierkegaard believed that there is room for the exceptional case, since religious experience transcends the ethical and can even set it aside. As Kierkegaard says by way of Johannes de Silentio: "The paradox of faith is this, that the individual is higher than the universal, that the individual determines his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal."<sup>9</sup> However, Kierkegaard himself envies Abraham because the latter was indeed a man of faith, whereas Kierkegaard knew very little of the spiritual powers that faith had for Abraham. "If I had had faith, I should have remained with Regina."<sup>10</sup> The significance of Fear and Trembling did provide Kierkegaard with a new "repetition" toward realizing the desire of living within the religious sphere of existence. He portrays faith as a transcendent and

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<sup>8</sup>Lowrie, p. 264.

<sup>9</sup>Johannes de Silentio, Fear and Trembling, p. 65.

<sup>10</sup>Lowrie, p. 253.

paradoxical element in Christianity, and thereby treats faith as the only way to suspend the normal moral or ethical requirements. In this respect, Kierkegaard becomes extremely Kantian in his view of the ethical as a strictly universal principle, but when Abraham makes himself an exception to the universal rule, he has abandoned the ethical and has entered into the realm of faith. Kierkegaard, himself, has no moral grounds for sacrificing his love for Regina, and his decision to do so even separated him from society because his actions and behavior had no rational grounds whatsoever. Kierkegaard, though not a man of faith like Abraham, had a love for God nevertheless, but did not willingly accept faith now because of his inability to fully comprehend it. One reason for writing Fear and Trembling was that Kierkegaard wanted faith completely analyzed, not only for himself, but for others who might be in his predicament. Faith, therefore, is rightly brought forth as a "paradox," bringing with it offense and absurdity to the human understanding. Prior to this conclusion of faith, Kierkegaard portrays faith in a redemptive sense by making it a "trust that with God all things are possible, that God can fulfill even the promise which he has shattered, indeed that with God all things are possible."<sup>10a</sup> Here, Kierkegaard knew that faith, as a "first immediacy," was not of the true authentic kind. Faith of the first immediacy meant for Kierkegaard that he somehow would get Regina back. But this was an impossibility, and so authentic faith had acquired a new meaning -- to Kierkegaard it meant a

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<sup>10a</sup>Dru, p. 157.

"second immediacy," coming not from relection or reason but instead from a "leap" or an act of will.<sup>11</sup>

"It is a state of immediacy in that it is a coming to grips with reality. It is an experience which is not mediated or established by reason and which is incommensurable with evidence. It is to be noted that there can also be a religious awareness (or immediacy) prior to reflection, an immediate consciousness of God. This too is 'immediacy' in that the natural religious consciousness is not mediated or caused by nature's splendours, but is a free religious sense to which one moves by a kind of leap from the gloves and mysteries of nature. However, prior to reflection, this religion is only a natural, religious wonder or awe, very different from that faith which alone can give one purity and reconciliation with God. Indeed, the natural religious awe (immediacy prior to reflection) may actually stand in the way of faith because it tends to conceal the crucial fact of sin."<sup>12</sup>

Thus, Kierkegaard was in this state of "first immediacy" and only later, in 1848, after a religious metamorphosis, did he become aware of the faith which is a faith of "second immediacy;" this latter type of faith clearly made him realize that the religious life takes on an aspect of precarious artistry and fearful responsibility, as one haltingly tries to be responsible to God in an incompletely charted way of life.

In conjunction with this first and second immediacies of faith, Kierkegaard shows how they correspond to what he calls "the knight of infinite resignation" and "the knight of faith." The "knight of infinite resignation" represents Kierkegaard himself, and it is representative of general or natural religiosity.

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<sup>11</sup>Lowrie, p. 265.

<sup>12</sup>George E. and George F. Arbaugh, Kierkegaard's Authorship, (Rock Island, Illinois, 1967) p. 111.

Accordingly, the "knight of faith" has as its forerunner, Abraham, and it corresponds to the Christian religiosity. Natural religiosity and Christian religiosity were later developed into Religion A and Religion B, found in the Postscript. Infinite resignation is the last phase a man enters before he willingly becomes a "knight of faith." It is the way by which a man becomes totally clear about himself with respect to his "eternal validity," gaining a sense of transcendency and of the infinite by freeing himself from the claims of finite things. The "knight of infinite resignation" reflects exactly the religious stance held by Kierkegaard at this time. He wishes to be like the "knights of faith" who obviously knows his place within eternity; what is more important is Kierkegaard's realization that this "knight of faith" is firmly fixed within eternity and is hence an authentic figure found in Christian religiosity. Indeed, this "knight of faith" demonstrates how this "particular individual" can be higher than the universal, who is the knight of infinite resignation and represents natural religiosity. Such a religion as that of christian religiosity is man's deed, as it was for Kierkegaard, because the "knight of faith" signifies the knightly defiance of all circumstances in a rather pathetic attempt to lift oneself by the bootstraps to a larger world. Kierkegaard is this "knight of infinite resignation" who develops an "aloof and superior attitude" toward the world, and a note of sadness which betrays his "heterogeneity with the finite."<sup>12a</sup> In contrast to what Kierkegaard would like to be,

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<sup>12a</sup>Lowrie, p. 289.

the knight of faith loves the world, for "with infinite resignation he has drained the cup of life's profound sadness, he knows the bliss of the infinite, he senses the pain of renouncing everything, the dearest things he possesses in the world, and yet finiteness tastes to him just as good as to one who never knew anything higher."<sup>13</sup> The "knight of faith" gains a joyousness of the world simply by believing in faith, which by "virtue of the absurd," gives him a "double movement of infinity," where the temporal and the eternal are given to him simultaneously.

In Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard identifies the ethical as the "universal" and the latter in turn correlates to natural religion and to "the knight of infinite resignation." Accordingly, the "particular" is identifiable as Christian religiosity and is characterized by the "knight of faith," who as a particular, is therefore an exception to the universal as such. Furthermore, faith is displayed by the "knight of faith" who has a unique relationship to God, because his type of faith is by virtue of the absurd. "Faith is precisely this paradox that the individual (knight of faith) as the particular is higher than the universal (knight of infinite resignation and natural religiosity) . . . for the fact that the individual as the particular stands in an absolute relation to the absolute (God)."<sup>14</sup> It is significant to note that Kierkegaard now develops this sense of individuality before God, for it is a theme that he strictly clings to

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<sup>13</sup>Johannes de Silentio, p. 55.

<sup>14</sup>Johannes de Silentio, p. 82.

hereafter; in fact, Kierkegaard personally proves the validity of this paradoxical conception of faith because in the last year of his life, he believed he was a Christian, and as such demonstrates that a "Christian" is an individual, who as a particular, is higher than the universal! Kierkegaard will realize that faith leads to an authentic person-to-person relationship to God; faith becomes Christian faith to Kierkegaard when he believes that God can be both mysterious and redemptive. Christian faith is the authentic faith leading to eventual salvation. Suffice it to say at this point that Kierkegaard was only the "knight of infinite resignation," which for him meant that he clearly was not sure of his infinite worth. "There can be no doubt that when Kierkegaard wrote Fear and Trembling he thought of himself as a knight of infinite resignation, but he was not yet a knight of faith. At that moment, he almost believed 'by virtue of the absurd' that he would get Regina back. But this was merely faith in a repetition in time. He was to attain a sublimer faith, after he had made the discovery that 'infinite resignation' can still be more infinite."<sup>15</sup>

In the Philosophical Fragments and in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, authored pseudonymously by Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard can be seen to further his self-education of Christianity by directing his efforts toward the separation which he saw was necessary between Hegelian Philosophy and Christianity. He believed that Hegel's speculative system had

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<sup>15</sup>Lowrie, p. 267.



also left out and robbed people of the feeling of what it means to exist. "You must have something that will entirely occupy your time, and here it is -- to find out wherein lies the misunderstanding between Speculation and Christianity. So this was my resolution. It is not necessary to recount my many false starts; but it finally became clear to me that the error of Speculation, and the presumptive right it based upon this to reduce faith to a subordinate factor, was not something accidental, but that it lies deeper in the whole tendency of our age -- must indeed be traced to the fact that with their much knowledge people had entirely forgotten what it is to exist and what inwardness means."<sup>16</sup> Kierkegaard wanted people to take notice of their own existence for themselves, because for Kierkegaard thought as well as faith was a passion. Hence he adopted Lessing's famous dictum "truth is inwardness, and he meant by it that truth is really possessed only when it is acquired by self-activity, that is, appropriated through reflection, not taken over as a finished product (a result) from somebody else's hand."<sup>17</sup> But thought resulting from inward consultation was only half of Kierkegaard's dictum for one to consider his existence; the other half is action. For Kierkegaard, it does no one any good just to merely think of his existence, he must as well do something for his existence; this properly means that the individual should place himself objectively in the world after

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<sup>16</sup>Johannes Climacus, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 212.

<sup>17</sup>Lowrie, p. 304.

consulting inwardly within himself. The Hegelian system analyzed existence in such a way as to make as if it never happened; and "Kierkegaard affirmed that though 'a logical system' is possible, a system of existence is impossible -- not for the divine mind, but for the individual who exists in time and space."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, one of the problems Kierkegaard faces "in becoming a Christian" is the intrusion of Speculation into the realm of Christianity, and so, with this thought in mind, he sets out his intentions in the Postscript by saying: "The reminder must be made at the outset that the problem is not about the truth of Christianity but about the individual's relationship to Christianity."<sup>19</sup> He establishes once again that the God-Man is a paradox or an "objective uncertainty," and the only method by which He can be grasped and made comprehensible to the human mind is by "subjectivity in inwardness." The God-Man is a crucifixion to the understanding, but God can be embraced by faith by "virtue of the absurd." "But the paradox of the God-Man is the most decisive expression of the fact that we cannot 'have' God as a tranquil possession, guaranteed by the immediacy of feeling and perception or by adequate rational proofs, but can only 'have' Him by having Him not in the constant struggle to possess, the endless effort to become a Christian."<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard seems to be stressing that

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<sup>18</sup>Johannes Climacus, Philosophical Fragments, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup>Climacus, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 27.

<sup>20</sup>Lowrie, p. 315.

authentic "religious faith is quite a different thing, occupying a sphere of its own which is not continuous with rational belief, not to be preached by any approximations of proof and probability, but only by a leap."<sup>21</sup> Therefore the distinctive Christian paradox is the God-Man, and it becomes clear that Kierkegaard wishes to have faith find its proper object in this paradox. In other words, faith discovers that the God-Man is a paradox to be grasped with the passion of inwardness. "Subjective certainty (faith) corresponds to 'objective uncertainty.' This is truth, and it is the highest truth for an exister. Without risk, no faith."<sup>22</sup> Hence, true Christianity is essentially paradoxical, and is the only example of Religion B; on the other hand, Religion A is natural religion where a heartfelt expression of God is only sensed, and Kierkegaard equates Religion A with paganism. The point is that Religion B can be attainable only through a transcendence of Religion A. It is interesting to note that Kierkegaard's "Edifying Discourses" were representatives of Religion A prior to 1848. Kierkegaard suddenly felt that true Christianity is what most "Christians" were not really members of, least of all the preachers! Kierkegaard, after educating himself on the Christian doctrines, came to the conclusion that true Christianity is not a religion, but more properly regarded as faith. "It is the only religion, but more properly regarded as faith, which bases the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>22</sup>Climacus, Postscript, p. 321.

hope of an eternal blessedness upon something historical, which moreover by its very nature cannot be historical, and so must become so by virtue of the absurd."<sup>23</sup>

In 1848, Kierkegaard experienced a religious conversion that deepened his sense of faith and escalated his movement "of becoming a Christian." He was content with the thought that God had forgotten as well as forgiven his tragic sins. Kierkegaard does say that the forgiveness of sin is a paradox -- no less paradoxical than the God-Man -- and here can be accepted only faith, "by virtue of the absurd," which Kierkegaard called the "thorn in the flesh;" these thorns in the flesh were the sins that he and his father had committed both against God and against woman. Kierkegaard, though believing that his own sins would be forgiven had always conceived of himself as being a "single individual" picked out from the crowd, deprived of the security of feeling in companionship of men, and standing directly under the eye of God. But by faith in God by "virtue of the absurd," Kierkegaard felt relief in the belief that God had forgotten and forgiven his past sins, and so rightly exclaims: "My whole nature is changed!"

Such a radical change within Kierkegaard expresses itself in the Sickness Unto Death, written by Anti-Climacus, and could easily be paralleled to the character of Kierkegaard himself. Anti-Climacus has dynamic significance because the name means

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<sup>23</sup>Lowrie, p. 326.

just the opposite of Johannes Climacus, who authored the Postscript and declared himself not to be a Christian in any way whatsoever. Anti-Climacus states the forms of despair which adequately sum up Kierkegaard's life before his conversion of 1848. "Despair is a sickness in the spirit, in the self, and so can assume one of three forms: in despair at not being conscious of having a self (improperly called despair); in despair at not willing to be one's self; in despair at willing to be one's self."<sup>24</sup> The religious experience of 1848 had erased these forms of despair and Kierkegaard had truly become spiritually liberated. "The formula for the state or condition where there is no despair at all. By relating itself to itself and by willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it. Which formula again as had been of ten pointed out, is the definition of faith."<sup>25</sup> With faith at last coming, Kierkegaard believed that he had acquired something else, something that would unite him firmly with God; he had acquired a theological self. Kierkegaard had thus been redeemed by God and had entered Christianity through the consciousness of his sin. "The spirit had at least come to him, and the knight of infinite resignation had received at last the accolade of the higher chivalry of faith."<sup>26</sup>

Kierkegaard, in the disguise of Anti-Climacus begins to speak quite critically about the wretched and illegitimate

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<sup>24</sup>Anti-Climacus, Sickness Unto Death, p. 146.

<sup>25</sup>Anti-Climacus, p. 262.

<sup>26</sup>Lowrie, p. 424.

practices of Christianity that were being conducted by the clergy. "Anti-Climacus" was attached to Training in Christianity, and Kierkegaard listed himself as editor, proving that his literary language had been written with boldness. The use of this pseudonym was Kierkegaard's way of acknowledging that he being only a poet, or a Socratic teacher, felt that he had no right to speak in the name of Christ in an attack on a degenerate Christendom. The fictitious Anti-Climacus could speak with bold and daring authority. Kierkegaard wanted an honest reply from the Established Church that the Christian religion was falsely being taught, and he aimed his attack at Bishops Mynster and Martensen, who were well known representatives of the Establishment. The clergy did not respond to Kierkegaard's call and Kierkegaard waited to begin his pamphleteering attack until his dear friend Bishop Mynster had died. After Mynster's death, Kierkegaard's contempt for Christendom became evident as he wrote articles in the "Fatherland," a magazine which had its distribution reach as far as Sweden, and he published "The Instant" therefore becoming a social activist eagerly handing out his pamphlets personally to the public. His themes were that "Christianity no longer exists" and that "Christendom is a conspiracy against the Christianity of the New Testament." Kierkegaard claimed that his attack upon Christendom was in defense of Christianity and "his summons was, 'Judge for yourself!'"

"He claimed no direct commission from God, no delegated authority but only such authority as every individual before God was responsible for exercising; the responsible authority of thinking clearly, as he for a whole lifetime had thought clearly, about what Christianity is and what it means to be a Christian. The only title he appropriated to himself was the 'Corrective' and he thought of his death rather as 'only a little pinch of spice' which was meant to give flavor to the whole and be lost in the whole; and he conceived that readiness to be sacrificed belonged to the common definition of a Christian, that sacrifice in one way or another was sure to be the Christian's lot."<sup>27</sup>

"The individual" had for Kierkegaard been his category, and it accurately summarizes his vigorous attempts at putting Christianity in its proper perspective. Moreover, it is obvious that the "individual" came to mean something more dear to him than when it earlier referred to "her," Regina. Specifically, "the individual" refers to the relationship that one must put himself in "before God;" it signifies a person-to-person encounter in which "the individual" is only an individual when he willingly submits himself to the grace of God. "Before God to be oneself -- for the accent rests upon 'before God,' since this is the source and origin of all individuality."<sup>28</sup> Praising and acknowledging God comes only from within the individual himself, by his spiritual determination and by his love of God, which is shown by continual worship.

"In as strong terms as possible, Kierkegaard made it plain that authentic existence is found solely and exclusively before God: there is only ONE who knows what HE HIMSELF is, that is, God; and He knows also what every man in himself is, for it is precisely by being before God that every man is. The man who is not before God is not himself, for this a man can be only by being before Him who

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<sup>27</sup>Lowrie, p. 556.

<sup>28</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Works of Love, (New York, 1962) p. 353.

is in and for Himself. If one is oneself by being in Him who is in and for Himself, one can be in others and before others, but one cannot by being merely before others be oneself."<sup>29</sup>

To Kierkegaard, the word "individual" signifies that the person has a Christianly relationship with God. "Briefly put, 'the individual' is a man who has become single (single-minded, single-willed, single-hearted, single-eyed) in response to and in order to respond to the individual summons of God's requirements and the individual chrism of his grace."<sup>30</sup> Therefore, "the individual" is one who dutifully and personally respects God for what He is, and "the individual" can be called Christianly if he also actively and inwardly pays tribute to God. "Only by being before God can a man entirely come to himself in the transparency of sobriety; Christianity thinks that precisely to become nothing -- before God -- is the way, and that if it could occur to anyone to wish to be something before God, this is drunkenness."<sup>31</sup> "To relate oneself to God personally, as an individual, quite literally as an individual is the formula for being a Christian and then, if they become individuals before God -- then we may have a Christian church again."<sup>32</sup> "The individual" is the decisive Christian category and as such, it establishes a personal,

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<sup>29</sup>Vernard Eller, Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship, (Princeton, New Jersey, 1968) p. 110.

<sup>30</sup>Vernard Eller, (Princeton, New Jersey, 1968) p. 111.

<sup>31</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Judge for Yourself, (New York, 1941) pp. 120-123.

<sup>32</sup>Anti-Climacus, Training in Christianity, p. 46.



responsible relationship to God. Kierkegaard would say that to have authentic existence within the Christian sphere of existence, one must be an "individual." The term "the individual" can be called the master category in so far as it promotes Christianliness within the individual thereby validating his Christianly existence. "In the final analysis, then, 'the individual' is one who has become single in repentance in order to find the grace and forgiveness of God which is bestowed upon and can be received by only those who are single."<sup>33</sup>

To be an "individual" is therefore to have authentic, Christianly existence; however, to be an "authentic individual" leading an "authentic existence" means something slightly different; it means precisely that one is a Christian. The "Christian" man is as authentic as it is possible to get; he is not only an "individual," but he is an "Authentic Individual" leading an "authentic existence." It is thus my contention that Soren Kierkegaard deserves to be called "a Christian," which comes from first being "an individual." I would venture to say that many individuals can become Christianly, but few ever go so far as to be "Christians." For me to label Kierkegaard as a "Christian" is what he actually deserves, though he, himself, would disagree. He is a "Christian" in the most Christianly sense of the word; having a deprived childhood where he was taught the Christian doctrines rather than being

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<sup>33</sup>Eller, p. 113.

taught how to socialize; carrying the burden of both his and his father's sins, thereby denied marriage to the girl he loved; taking on more suffering from public ridicule after he had attacked a sophisticated magazine; and putting himself into Christianity to find a meaning for his own life and then to defend its true meaning by rightly lashing out at the Established Church -- all of this stands and testifies as very convincing proof to show clearly that this "solitary individual" known as Soren Kierkegaard was indeed a Christian par excellence.

"Only a man of iron will can become a Christian. For only he has a will that can be broken. But a man of iron will whose will is broken by the Unconditional, i.e., by God, is a Christian. The stronger the natural will is, the more completely broken it can be and the better the Christian . . . A Christian is a man of iron will, who no longer desires his own will, but the passion of his contrite will -- fundamentally changed -- desires the will of another."<sup>34</sup>

Kierkegaard, himself, believed that God has "picked him out" from the crowd, to serve as the "sacrifice" and as the "corrective," in an age which needed Christian rebuilding. He remarks in his journals that "according to the New Testament, to be a Christian properly means to be sacrificed; it predicts that every true Christian will be sacrificed in one way or another."<sup>35</sup> His attitude seems still more convincing yet, when in another journal entry he says: "Of all torments being a Christian is the most terrible; it is -- and that is how it

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<sup>34</sup>Lowrie, p. 489.

<sup>35</sup>Dru, Journals of Kierkegaard, p. 247.

should be -- to know hell in this life."<sup>36</sup> In conclusion, it is safe to agree with Lowrie that "he had not yet become a Christian -- until he had died for his faith."<sup>37</sup> With this in mind, Soren Kierkegaard deserves the right to be remembered foremost as a Christian, for he indeed was a particular exception to the universal!

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<sup>36</sup>Peter Rohde, The Diary of Soren Kierkegaard, (New York, 1960) p. 200.

<sup>37</sup>Lowrie, Short Life of Kierkegaard, p. 166.

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