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Living Poetically in the Modern Age

The Situational Aspects of Kierkegaard’s Thought

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Introduction

Background

In order to understand a movement of thought, in certain cases it is helpful to have a look at its background in the life of individual human beings. Although it is not customary in academic writing, perhaps it is not out of place to explore the personal background of this work when its topic is a thinker such as Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). It is hard to approach his texts at all, and certainly something essential is lost in their interpretation, if one does not approach them personally. Perhaps a recollection of a personal approach to Kierkegaard’s world may help the academic reader recollect that this type of approach exists and is the natural one when approaching Kierkegaard. The story is not an extraordinary one but I consider it the more significant the more typical it is. I hope it will make the meaning of this research more readily understandable, and lead the reader to contemplate the theme of it: the differences between common sense, philosophical, scientific, and religious orientations in life.

Becoming acquainted with philosophy in the 1980s meant a kind of awakening for me personally. I had been unable to make sense of the life around and within me. I had been perplexed by myself, by human relationships, and by strange and apparently meaningless human practices. I saw life around me as a series of amoral routines: routines of going to school, doing meaningless work, running after transitory things, competing with each other, trying to become rich and successful, and waging wars. I was thinking a lot about ethical and social problems, but found no solid answers where I looked for them: not in school subjects, not in arts and literature, and certainly not in the teaching and practices
Introduction

of the Evangelic-Lutheran Church, a member of which I was as a
member of my family. There was no one who could have given an
account to me on what life was about and it seemed that most
people were not even aware of the question; they were just living
as others were.

And then I ran into Socrates and his followers! My constant
reflection on the problems of life was legitimate. I learnt that un-
der the name of philosophy it had been around at least for 2500
years and that it had been considered the core of our European
culture. So with an enthusiasm that I have not experienced since, I
plunged right into it and by the end of the 1980s found myself as a
student of philosophy at the University of Helsinki.

There I received a cold shower. I had to take courses in formal
logic, in the theory of science, and in what went under the name of
moral philosophy. I came to know the professors and the research-
ers. I did meet some teachers and students, whose approach, atti-
tude, and questioning still reminded me of Socrates, but they
seemed to be permanently on the margin of what was going on. In
the following years I grew increasingly frustrated with the so-called
analytical philosophy that was dominating the scene in Finland.
After three years of persistent but desperate studying, I was ready
to escape all those fruitless discussions and forget them as best I
could. But the ethical problems of life I could not escape.

At this time I was reminded by the writings of Wittgenstein
that there was life outside philosophy and, more specifically, that
there was also another, religious approach to ethics. Inspired fur-
ther by the writings of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, by the classical
Greek authors and the Bible, I gradually came to realize that eth-
ics, as I understood it, went after all hand in hand with religion. I
came to think that religious ethics is higher and with respect to
human existence more primary and more adequate than philoso-
phical ethics: it demanded more and addressed the whole human
being. Around the same time I came to experience in practice the
weakness of my own ethical will and the limits of my self-knowledge when, after a process that appeared to be beyond my control, an important human relationship broke down. My studies came to a complete halt and that was not the worst of it: I had lost the basis for my personal existence, too. Desperately seeking the basis again and trying to comprehend and control the movements in my soul, I came to read Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love* (*Kjerlighedens Gjerninger*, 1847).

To my surprise, it helped. There was something in those Christian discourses that helped me to find a new beginning. I started now to read more Kierkegaard, whom I had considered before as a rather frivolous and affected writer. I found out that beneath the somewhat repulsive romantic language, there was an abundance of rigorous ethical thought. Kierkegaard, it seemed to me, was as disciplined as Socrates and Kant and as capable in making good judgments. But he was able to go even deeper in his deliberations and to capture the very passions, thoughts, and images that informed my ethical striving. His religious and psychological ideas clarified and gave meaning to the depressing experiences that I had had in my personal life. While in his discourses he addressed directly the negative phenomena of the human spirit, he was also able to direct the reader forcefully toward the positive that overcomes the negative. After having read Kierkegaard I was able to look forward again in my personal life. Moreover, Kierkegaard also explicated vigorously and consistently my intuitions on the superiority of Socratic thought over commonsense reflection, and the superiority of concrete religious thought over abstract philosophical thought. So now I had again a treasure to cultivate in the field of research and I resumed my studies. My idea was to explicate the quality of Kierkegaard’s ethical-religious thought: how did it differ from philosophical, scientific, and commonsense reflection?

In the late 1990s, then, I started to work on my master’s thesis on Kierkegaard’s ethics. Going through the secondary literature, I
came across a study by Arne Grøn, *Subjektivitet og negativitet: Kierkegaard* (1997). What Grøn wrote about the second ethics of Kierkegaard seemed to me insightful and his overall approach as very fruitful in unraveling the logic of Kierkegaard’s thought. The approach was a phenomenological one that Grøn had developed in dialogue with the work of Michael Theunissen and that took as its starting point the negative phenomena of human spirit, such as melancholy, anxiety, and despair. I thought that with the help of this approach, it would be possible to uncover the secret of Kierkegaard’s religious ethics. Glad that such a new approach had opened up, I packed my bags and traveled from Helsinki to Copenhagen in order to work there on my own thesis with the support of a Nordlys scholarship.

During the year I spent in Copenhagen I read other writings and attended lectures by professor Grøn. I also attended lectures by Pia Søltoft, who was following the approach of Grøn in her work on Kierkegaard’s ethics, and read her dissertation *Svimmelhedens etik* (*Ethics of Dizziness*) that was later published (2000). But little by little I began to realize that the phenomenological theology of Grøn and Søltoft was still not quite what I had been looking for. To me it seemed that some essential aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought were missing in it. What was missing was the sense that thinking is always situated in a stream of life and in a larger historical context. “Becoming” was certainly a major theme that Grøn took up in his works and Søltoft’s work revolved around the theme of “intersubjectivity.” But the atmosphere in which the universal structures and dynamics of subjectivity and intersubjectivity were uncovered by the theologians was different from Kierkegaard’s poetic and religious writings. The intellectual work was here done within a scientific discipline; the structures of the self were investigated as if in a well-lit room. The context that came to view in the texts of Kierkegaard was larger, more open, and more filled with tension, and reading him I always felt that the
ethical-religious subject addressed, analyzed, and depicted therein existed all the time out there in the world.

It made me reconsider the old existentialist theme of situatedness. That a human being always finds himself in a situation but also actively situates himself and creates his own situation was one of the central ideas of Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976).¹ In French existentialism Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) had been occupied with the same theme.² From the history of 20th century philosophy I knew that the theme had become a sort of stumbling block for phenomenological and existentialist philosophy. The consideration of the situation only from the point of view of the finite subject was eventually considered insufficient. Philosophers in this tradition had started to doubt that taking the subject as the starting point for reflection of the world was a fruitful way to tackle the historical and social actuality in which the subject is involved. Consequently, Marxism, structuralism, poststructuralism, and the theory of communicative action had superceded the egocentric preoccupations of existentialists. However, while I had studied social philosophy and sociology, I had become skeptical that with the help of such all-encompassing scientific theories a concrete human being could ever reach the level of his actual life. After all, all scientific work was already social activity and as such required a right kind of orientation from its practitioners. One had to take first of all a kind of ironic attitude towards the views and life of ordinary people, including oneself; then, I guess, one was supposed to find one’s way back to that life. But, for

¹ Jaspers 1971, 229–232; Jaspers 1932, vol. 1, 1–4; Heidegger 1972, 232 and 299–300. For a good overview of the history of the use of the concept of “situation” from Hegel, through the philosophy of existence, to present day psychology and sociology, see Laucken 1996.

² On situatedness in French existentialism, see Kruks 1990.
Introductions

my part, I could not see how that could be done with the help of these sociological theories. Moreover, it seemed to me that with sociological wisdom, just as with the world historical wisdom that Kierkegaard had been criticizing in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (*Afsluttende uvidenskabelige Efterskrift*, 1846), personal ethics tended either to be lost or at least seriously distorted.

On the other hand, in my view Kierkegaard did take into consideration the context around the subject. To be sure the focus of Kierkegaard’s texts was in the inwardness of subjectivity, and in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Johannes Climacus renounced the world historical reflection. But even the humorist Climacus did reflect his times and his situation in it, and reflection of the context of subjective existence seemed indeed to be a recurrent element in pretty much all of Kierkegaard’s writings. Not only in the literary criticism that he wrote, but also in his poetic and philosophical analyses of subjectivity, in his treatises in dogmatic or Christian psychology, and in his upbuilding and religious discourses, the historical and social actuality around and between the subjects was also there, was also referred to and taken into account. Thus, I started to investigate how Kierkegaard took into consideration the situatedness of existence in his ethical-religious thought.

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3 For example, *From the Papers of One Still Living* (*Af en endnu Levendes Papirer*, 1838), *Two Ages* (*En literair Anmeldelse*, 1846), and *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (*Synspunktet for min Forfatter-Virksomhed*, 1859).
5 *Concept of Anxiety* (*Begrebet Angest*, 1844) and *Sickness unto Death* (*Sygdommen til Døden*, 1849).
6 For example, *Works of Love* (*Kjerlighedens Gjerninger*, 1847), *Christian Discourses* (*Christelige Taler*, 1848), and *For Self-Examination* (*Til Selvprøvelse*, 1851).
Objectives, Methods, and Structure of the Work

The doctoral thesis at hand is the result of these investigations. It explores the situational aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought by going through in detail Kierkegaard’s key texts. At the same time it analyzes the ethical-religious life that Kierkegaard championed, evaluates its rationality, and compares it with ways of life dominated by reflection and reasoning. I hope the thesis sheds light both on the universe of Kierkegaard’s thought and, more generally, on the ways of life-orientation open to us.

The work at hand attempts

1) to situate the Kierkegaardian subject in its historical context,
2) to shed light on Kierkegaard’s social and political thought,
3) to characterize Kierkegaard as a religious thinker, and
4) to analyze the religious orientation in life in its opposition to the philosophical, scientific and commonsense orientations.

The work combines a close study of Kierkegaard’s texts with an attempt to explicate his thought analytically and systematically. The basic hypothesis is that there is consistency in the way Kierkegaard situates the subject into its context and that this consistency could be captured and explicated with the help of the ethical-religious conception of living poetically that Kierkegaard presents in his dissertation. I try to bring evidence to support this hypothesis by reading carefully through some key texts of Kierkegaard. The approach will be as true to Kierkegaard’s intentions as possible. In this study I am interested in how Kierkegaard conceived human situatedness—including his own situatedness—in his texts. Thus, I am not interested, for example, in how human situatedness deconstructed and deconstructs Kierkegaard’s thought. The reason why I reject this and other timely approaches to the topic is that, by explicating Kierkegaard’s own approach, I hope we will derive a religious alternative for scientific (and pseudo-scientific) ways to consider situatedness.
Kierkegaard is usually considered as a philosopher or a theologian of subjectivity, as, for example, in the central Finnish research literature by Esa Saarinen (1985) and Heidi Liehu (1990). That is, of course, justified: the human subject is indeed the focus of Kierkegaard’s ethical-religious thought. Often, however, Kierkegaard is also accused of neglecting the world around the subject, and it has been a controversial issue in Kierkegaard research whether he was a subjectivist neglecting the objective, historical, and social world around the subject, or whether he saw the human being as a member of the human race and as belonging to social, historical, and natural contexts. As representative proponents of various more or less “solipsistic” interpretations, one may mention Torsten Bohlin (1918), Gyorgy Lukács (1981, original 1954), Edo Pivčević (1960), Gregor Malantschuk (1978), Mark C. Taylor (1975 and 1980), and Louis Mackey (1986). As proponents of various more or less “contextualist” interpretations one may mention Karl Löwith (1964, original 1941), Hermann Diem (1966, original 1964), Kresten Nordentoft (1973 and 1977), Johannes Slok (1978, 1980, 1983, and 1989), Merold Westphal (1987), and Arne Grøn (1993 and 1997). The work at hand falls into the “contextualist” camp. It attempts to defend the view that Kierkegaard always situated the subject into its context by showing through a detailed exegesis of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous texts how he did it.\footnote{In recent years a huge amount of work has been performed in order to put Kierkegaard back into his historical context through historical-critical research. One may mention the works by Bruce H. Kirmmse (1990 and 1996), George Pattison (1999), Joakim Garff (2000), Alastair Hannay (2001), Jon Stewart (2003), Peter Tudvad (2004), the commentaries to the new edition of Kierkegaard’s Writings (SKS K1–, 1997–) and the other big projects of the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center in Copenhagen. As a result an abundance of interesting information has accumulated for all who want to better understand the message of Kierkegaard. However, in this kind of historical research and in using it it is important to consider how Kierkegaard himself situated the subject}
The “contextualist” interpretations claim that Kierkegaard did not neglect, but took into consideration the social, historical, and natural context of individual human existence. Although the above mentioned “contextualist” interpreters of Kierkegaard have shown that he considered the contextuality of human existence, in my view it has not been explicated how he situated the subject in its context. Moreover, the focus of these interpretations has been in the authorship that follows Concluding Unscientific Postscript. The ideas presented in Kierkegaard’s dissertation The Concept of Irony (Om Begrebet Ironi, 1841) and in pseudonymous works have not received due attention. With my close reading of these works, the work at hand attempts to open up a new perspective into the contextuality of Kierkegaard’s thought. By taking the ideal of living poetically and the idea of the situatedness of the subject as my clues in reading the pseudonymous authorship, it counters in a more radical way the interpretations of Kierkegaard as a subjectivist with a tendency towards asocial, ahistorical, and acosmic solipsism. If the reading is correct, the “solipsistic” reading does not apply to any part of Kierkegaard’s authorship.

The work that bears chief responsibility for Kierkegaard’s reputation as an acosmic subjectivist who neglected the objective and social world around him is probably Concluding Unscientific Postscript. In this work the pseudonym Johannes Climacus declares: firstly, that the highest task assigned to every human being is to become subjective; secondly, that subjectivity is the truth; and
thirdly, that the ethical actuality of the subject is his only actuality. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is often considered as Kierkegaard’s main work, and indeed Kierkegaard himself gives it a central place in his authorship. Since Kierkegaard also focuses on the inwardness of subjectivity in his psychological works and religious speeches, it is understandable that readers have the impression that Kierkegaard neglected the reality outside the subject.

However, a preliminary consideration of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, its context, and its place in Kierkegaard’s authorship already shows that this picture might not be quite correct and there are grounds to argue for the opposite. First of all, it seems that the pseudonym Climacus assumes an extreme position in *Postscript* in order to correct both the Hegelian and the Grundtvigian world-historical and social orientation. At the same time, however, he clearly agrees with G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) and N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872) to the extent that he recognizes that the subject tends to be immersed in history and society. Second, in that he reacts against the collectivistic tendency of his times, Climacus does relate to his times in a definite way. Climacus is also conscious of this himself, and explains to his reader how he relates to his times. Third, Climacus does not represent the final truth for Kierkegaard; as an imaginary humorist he represents an intermediary position between the ethical and the Chris-

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8 So already Kierkegaard’s friend, the philosopher Hans Brochmer (1820–1875). See Kirmmse 1996, 347.
9 PV, 8–9 and 31 / SV1 XIII, 497–498 and 523. (On the abbreviations of Kierkegaard’s and Hegel’s writings, see the Bibliography of this work, pp. 642–646.)
10 Kierkegaard just considers this a danger. Confer, for example, the huge building, at the top of which a private thinker lives as a poor lodger in CUP, 63 / SV1 VII, 47–48, or the terrible possibility Climacus entertains in CUP, 244 / SV1 VII, 205.
tian life. In intermediary positions, in irony and humor, the Kierkegaardian subject takes distance from his surroundings and relates to his times negatively, but Kierkegaard hardly meant that the actual subject should, or even could, remain in such an intermediary position for good. Fourth, Postscript is a postscript to Philosophical Fragments (Philosophiske Smuler, 1844), which gives the context for the subjective striving described and analyzed in Postscript. In Fragments Climacus describes how the subject relates to the historical actuality in the Socratic or in the Christian way. Thus, a description of different relations to historical actuality is implied in Postscript, too. Fifth, Climacus also uses as his material other texts by Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, such as The Concept of Irony, Either/Or (Enten-Eller, 1843), and The Concept of Anxiety (Begrebet Angest, 1844), and in these the subject is situated in the historical context. Sixth, Postscript is followed by texts, such as Two Ages (En litterair Anmeldelse, 1846), Practice in Christianity (Indøvelse i Christendom, 1851), and The Point of View for My Work as an Author (Synspunktet for min Forfatter-Virksomhed, 1859), in which the subject is also situated in the historical actuality.

The objective of the dissertation is to verify the claims above by bringing out through a detailed exegesis of Kierkegaard’s texts the rich “empirical” material that confirms them. In order to relocate the Kierkegaardian subject back into its context, I will go through these works surrounding Postscript and correlate what is written in

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12 It seems likely that Kierkegaard himself counts the position of Climacus among those positions that “no factually actual person dares to allow himself or can allow himself in the moral limitations of actuality (CUP, 625 / SVI VII, 545).”

13 To verify the first thesis the work at hand would have to go far beyond the bounds of Kierkegaard’s own text. Besides, I lack the capacity needed to carry out the task properly. Therefore, the first thesis must remain as a thesis only—I will concentrate on the rest of them.
them on different ways of living in the historical and social actuality with what Climacus writes in *Postscript* on different stages of existence. This task is carried out in chapters 1–8.

My strategy is to reintroduce the context of existence by reading Kierkegaard, not in the light of the concept of existence, but in the light of the conception of *living poetically* that Kierkegaard formulated in his dissertation *The Concept of Irony*. In the existing research literature, Kierkegaard’s conception has been brought forth by Sylvia Walsh in her insightful work *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard’s Existential Aesthetics* (1994). The difference between the work of Sylvia Walsh and the work at hand is in the use that is made of the notion of living poetically in bringing into focus different aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought. The interest of Walsh is in showing “that throughout his authorship Kierkegaard maintains a fundamentally positive understanding of the poetic as an essential ingredient in...ethical and religious forms of life.” In addition Walsh is interested in showing how Kierkegaard develops an *existential aesthetics*:

- by emphasizing "the representation of the aesthetic ideal in human life rather than in external or material works of art,"
- by emphasizing "the primacy of subjectivity over the disinterested objectivity of traditional aesthetics,"
- by interpreting the "aesthetic categories as existential categories,"
  and
- by emphasizing "individual striving toward wholeness."

Although Walsh notes that there is also “a social-political dimension” in Kierkegaard’s thought and notes that a sense of our his-
torical situatedness was part of Kierkegaard’s conception of living poetically, she does not use the conception of living poetically to clarify these aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought. This, to investigate the situational aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought, is my objective.

In *The Concept of Irony* Kierkegaard considers the Romantic ideal of living poetically and argues that a human being is able to live poetically in a historical and social context only if he considers life from the religious point of view (chapter 1 of the work at hand). Thus, Kierkegaard appropriates the ideal of living poetically from the Romantic ironists and gives it an ethical-religious meaning. For him living poetically comes to mean:

- becoming brought up by God, while
- assuming ethical-religiously one’s role and place in the historical actuality.

Through a minute exegesis and analysis I try to show that this ideal of living poetically determines Kierkegaard’s thought through his authorship from *Either/Or* (chapter 3) via *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments* (chapter 5) to *The Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity* (chapter 7). These works complement *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in which the focus is on the inwardness of the ethical-religious subject. In their light it becomes clear that aesthetic, ethical, and religious spheres of existence analyzed in *Postscript* refer to alternative modes of living poetically in the historical and social actuality (chapters 2, 4, and 6). Finally, *On My Work as an Author* and *The Point of View of My Work as an Author* show that Kierkegaard tried to hold on to the ideal of living poetically also in his personal life (chapter 8).

After the exegesis of Kierkegaard’s texts, an attempt is made in the final chapter, chapter 9, to analyze systematically Kierkegaard’s project of living poetically and to sketch how the different elements of human existence function as constituents of it. The aim

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18 Walsh 1994, 2 and 57–58.
is to construct a consequent position that, I imagine, Kierkegaard could have recognized as his own, and that, in my view, is still a viable option. In chapter 9 it is also discussed how the research at hand relates to and complements the work of other Kierkegaard scholars, i.e. what it will to contribute to ongoing Kierkegaard research.

While one objective of the work at hand is to uncover the situational aspect of Kierkegaard’s thought, the other is to clarify Kierkegaard’s quality as a religious thinker and to compare the ideal of living poetically with various ideals of “living reasonably” of philosophers and modern human beings. Although this second topic informs the analysis of Kierkegaard’s texts and is discussed here and there in chapters 1–8, it is not until chapter 9 that the topic is brought into focus. The final chapter introduces Kierkegaard’s project into more general philosophical discussions on rationality, contextuality, and the good life and prepares the ground for its critical assessments side by side with its ancient and modern alternatives.

“Situation” and “Living Poetically”

The concepts pertaining to the ideal of living poetically receive content in the course of the exegesis of Kierkegaard’s works. But because the key concepts “situation” and “living poetically” inform the whole exegesis as tools of analysis and interpretation, it is appropriate to clarify their meaning and use in advance. These concepts are derived from Kierkegaard’s writings, but in the exegesis they will be used independently in explicating his thought further than he did himself.

As Uwe Laucken notes in his article “Situation: Psychologie und Soziologie” (1996) Kierkegaard never fixes the meaning of “situation” terminologically as Hegel did before and as the phi-
However, on the basis of Kierkegaard’s use of the term, we may define the Kierkegaardian concept of situation in connection with and in contrast to both the Hegelian and the existentialist concepts.

In his Lectures on Aesthetics Hegel refers by the term “situation” (Situation) to the middle stage between “the universal, inherently unmoved, state of world” and concrete action. In the situation difference and strain are introduced into the “substantial unity” that characterizes the state of world in its status quo, and this leads to action in that the opposition of different world-views leads to dramatic collisions, to action and reaction. Hegel obviously appropriated the term “situation” from the world of dramatic art and he uses it in analyzing the structure of drama works. The same applies to Kierkegaard, who might have appropriated the term precisely from Hegelian aesthetic criticism. However,
Kierkegaard goes on to apply the term not only in relation to aesthetics, but also in analyzing the relation of the acting subject to the historical and social actuality in which he belongs.

In this respect Kierkegaard uses the term more like the philosophers of existence. Common to the latter was the idea that in relation to his situation the subject is both passive and active. According to Jaspers,

> When I become aware of myself I see that I am in a world in which I take my bearings...  
> ...The situation comes out of the past and has historic depth; it is never finished, harboring within itself the possibilities and inevitabilities of the future. There is no other form of reality for me, as I exist in it. It is what I start thinking from and what I return to...  
> ... It is *never something purely immediate.* As something that has come to be, it contains past realities and free decisions. As something that is now it lets me breathe the possible future...  

Heidegger writes about “hermeneutical Situation” (*hermeneutische Situation*), which determines the fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception of every interpretation. On the other hand, he writes about the “Situation” that it is “the ‘there’ which is disclosed in resoluteness—the ‘there’ as which the existent entity is there.”

This Situation is not just “a framework present-at-hand in which Dasein occurs,” it is what is disclosed in the resoluteness of Dasein. If resoluteness is lacking, the authentic possibilities that are there in the Situation are closed off and there is no “Situation” (*Situation*), just “situation” (*Lage*): “For the ‘they’, however, the

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(1791–1860), whose Hegelian drama criticism apparently made a strong impression on Kierkegaard in the 1830s (see *Fenger* 1964; *Pattison* 1983; *Hannay* 2001, 15–19; and *Stewart* 2003b, 114.)

28 Ibid.
Situation is essentially something that has been closed off. The ‘they’ knows only the ‘general situation [allgemeine Lage]’, loses itself in those ‘opportunities’ which are closest to it...”

Thus, according to Jaspers and Heidegger, the subject both finds himself in the situation and actively situates himself so that the mode of his existence decides how the situation opens up for him. The same idea may be found in the French existentialists, and also in Kierkegaard.

Let us now try to define Kierkegaard’s and our use of the term “situation” (Situation). Putting the Hegelian term in broader use, Kierkegaard transfers the term “situation” from the theory of drama to the analysis of real-life and socio-historical situations. The transference is already manifest in The Concept of Irony, where Kierkegaard admonishes Xenophon for the “total lack of situation” in describing Socrates. Kierkegaard refers here to the dramatic real-life situations in which the ironic Socrates conversed with his contemporaries and presented “the idea” in its “infinite negativity” in the middle of the bustling finitude of everyday Ath-

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30 See, for example, Merleau-Ponty 1962, 453: “The world is already constituted, but also never completely constituted; in the first case we are acted upon, in the second we are open to an infinite number of possibilities. But this analysis is still abstract, for we exist in both ways at once. There is, therefore, never determinism and never absolute choice. I am never a thing and never a bare consciousness. In fact, even our own pieces of initiative, even the situations which we have chosen, bear us on, once they have been entered upon, by virtue of a state rather than an act. The generality of the ‘rôle’ and of the situation comes to the aid of decision, and in this exchange between the situation and the person who takes it up, it is impossible to determine precisely the ‘share contributed by the situation’ and the ‘share contributed by freedom’.”

31 Kierkegaard uses also such terms as “Forholdene,” “Livsforhold,” and “Bestedelse” in a similar way to how he uses the term “Situation.” However, in order to give a preliminary view on how he thought the human individual to be situated in his context, it is sufficient to examine his use of the term “Situation.”
In *Either/Or*, Part I, the pseudonym A refers with the term “situation” to the situations in opera and drama in his analyses of *Don Giovanni* and *Antigone*, and in his review of *The First Love.* But in the same book Johannes the Seducer reflects also real-life situations from the aesthetic point of view. Later Kierkegaard refers to real-life situations, for example, when he writes about the “situation of actuality” in contrast to the situation in which one listens the sermon in a church. To the social situations Kierkegaard refers with the term in his analysis of the present age in *Two Ages*. There he claims that the disappearance of concrete communal life gives rise to the public and that, on the other hand, the existence of the anonymous public prevents individuals becoming contemporaneous with each other in the concrete situations of actuality:

The public is a concept that simply could not have appeared in antiquity, because the people were obliged to come forward *en masse in corpore* [as a crowd that forms one body and that is corporeal] in the situation of action, were obliged to bear the responsibility for what was done by individuals in their midst, while in turn the individual was obliged to be present in person as the one specifically involved and had to submit to the summary court for approval or disapproval. Only when there is no strong communal life to give substance to the concretion will the press create this abstraction “the public,” made of unsubstantial individuals who are never united in the simultaneity of any situation or organization and yet are claimed to be a whole... Contemporaneity with actual persons, each of whom is someone, in the actuality of the moment and the actual situation gives support

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32 *CI*, 16–18 / *SVI* XIII, 112–114. On the negative activity of ironic Socrates, see chapter 1 of this work.
34 *EOI*, 305 and 326 / *SVI* I, 277 and 297–298.
to the single individual. But the existence of a public creates no situation and no community.\textsuperscript{36}

To the socio-historical situation he refers, for example, in \textit{On My Work as an Author} (\textit{Om min Forfatter-Virksomhed}, 1851), where he points out Christendom as the situation of his work as an author.\textsuperscript{37} He also refers to socio-historical situations in \textit{Practice in Christianity} and in other texts, in which the difference between Christendom and the world of the New Testament is emphasized\textsuperscript{38}

Like the existentialists, Kierkegaard considers situations as given to the subject through historical and social events, but at the same time as shaped by the subject himself. In \textit{The Concept of Irony} Kierkegaard claims that the situation and the person’s rejoinder (\textit{Replik}) to it make up an organic whole: “[S]ituation and rejoinder are the combination that makes up the personality’s ganglionic and cerebral system.”\textsuperscript{39} The situation gives an occasion for a movement of a human spirit, but on the other hand the “rejoinder” of the human being contributes to the situation and to his appropriation of it in an independent way. In the aesthetic sphere of existence Johannes the Seducer, who is said to attempt living poetically in real life,\textsuperscript{40} enjoys first the poetic in the situations of actuality that he had poetized and next in his poetical recollection of them. Johannes enjoyed first “that which in part actuality gave

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{36} TA, 91 / SV1 VIII, 85.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} PV, 8 n.2 / SV1 XIII, 496 n.3.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} PC, 107 / SV1 XII, 102. See also M, 30–32 / SV1 XIV, 36–38 and JP 4, 4053, 4055, 4058, and 4059 / Pap. X 2 A 13, XI 1 A 562, XI 2 A 319, and XI 2 A 343.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} CI, 19 / SV1 XIII, 115.
  \item \textsuperscript{40} See EO1, 304 / SV1 I, 276: “His life has been an attempt to accomplish the task of living poetically. With a sharply developed organ for discovering the interesting in life, he has known how to find it and after having found it has continually reproduced his experiences half poetically.”
\end{itemize}
to him and which in part he himself had used to fertilize actuality,” and then, afterwards in his diary, he enjoyed “the situation and himself in the situation.” Thus there is both passivity and activity in the relationship of a self-conscious aesthete to his situations.

The same holds for the ethical-religious individual, even if he relates to his situations in a completely different way. In Philosophical Fragments Johannes Climacus describes Socrates as a teacher of virtue and eternal truth, who was both “influenced by circumstances” and who “in turn exerted an influence upon them.” In accomplishing his task, Socrates “satisfied the claims within himself just as much as he satisfied the claims other people might have on him.” As “life and its situations [Forholdene]” were the occasion for Socrates to become a teacher, he became “the occasion for others to learn something.” In Stages on Life’s Way (Stadier paa Livets Vej, 1845) the pseudonym Quidam feels gratitude to his beloved for bringing him “into the proper situation” and becoming conscious of his responsibility.

Here it might seem that the individual would be passive and that the situation is what makes the individual feel responsible, but in Two Ages Kierkegaard points out that it always depends on the individual, and whether he takes the situation to demand an ethical response or not:

It is not uncommon to hear a man who has become confused about what he should do in a particular situation blame the specific nature of the situation, thinking that he could easily act if the situation were a great event with only one either/or. This is a mistake and a hallucination of the understanding. There is no such situation. The presence of the crucial either/or depends upon the individual’s own impassioned desire directed toward acting decisively, upon the individual’s own intrinsic competence. And therefore a competent man

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41 EOI, 305 / SV1 I, 277. (Translation slightly modified.)
42 PF, 23 / SV1 IV, 192.
43 SLW, 87–184 / SV1 VI, 86.
covets an either/or in every situation because he does not want anything more.\footnote{TA, 67 / SV1 VIII, 63. Translation slightly altered.)}

If we put these statements together the conclusion is that in the ethical-religious sphere the subject is also both passive and active, when he reacts and acts to different situations.

In the Christian sphere of existence the incarnation of God situates us anew, whether we like it or not. The subject is basically passive, in that he reacts to the action of the God-man, but active, in that it is up to him how he reacts. According to the Christian view that Johannes Climacus constructs in Philosophical Fragments, the subject may either receive the passion of faith or become offended at the God-man.\footnote{PF, 49–54 and 58–59 / SV1 IV, 215–221 and 223–224.} Later, in Practice in Christianity Anti-Climacus emphasizes that it is up to us not only to hear the call of Christ, but also to follow and imitate him in the situation of actuality.\footnote{PC, 23–68 / SV1 XII, 21–65.} In Kierkegaard’s thinking this action, which creates an actual situation of contemporaneity with Christ and a situation of decisive tension with the environing world, eventually becomes a condition of faith.\footnote{JP 2, 1142, 1880–1881, 1908, and JP 4, 4933–4934 / Pap. X 3 A 454–455 and 470–471, X 4 A 114, and XI 4 A 459.} The human being must actively situate himself in the actual world in order truly to have Christian faith. The right kind of Christian passivity requires the right kind of Christian activity.\footnote{Lønning 1954, 44–45.}

Thus, in each existence sphere the individual both finds himself as situated and actively situates himself. The different existence-spheres imply different ways to become situated and to situate oneself. These ways will be examined in detail in chapters 1–8, while here I present a brief preview for the sake of orientation: In the immediate aesthetic existence the individual situates himself...
unconsciously into his context or, he is situated by the forces within him and by his historical and social surrounding, which comes to the same thing. In the commonsense aesthetic existence the individual adapts himself, on the one hand, to his surroundings and, on the other, to the finite forces within him in a prudent, calculating way. In the ironic aesthetic existence the individual annihilates with irony the bonds of bourgeois life that keep him captive and makes room for the infinite passions in order to enjoy their free and beautiful manifestations. In the ethical-religious existence the individual situates himself back in the world by choosing himself in front of the eternal and by appropriating his concrete historical existence through religious repentance. In the Christian existence the life of Christ re-composes the individual and he becomes a follower of Christ. This implies not only that he comes to see life and his neighbors in a new light, but also that he comes to suffer in the sinful world through which he is bound to follow Christ into eternity.

When the individual situates himself into his context he may be spiritually active or not. In the immediate and commonsense existence the spirit that will relate the finite to the infinite and the temporal to the eternal is not yet active, and the way the individual becomes situated depends on his given desires and his finite and temporal surroundings. To use Heidegger’s terminology, the “Situation” (Situation) is closed off and the individual has just the general “situation” (Lage), a framework present-at-hand in which there is no personal meaning and no spiritual dimension. In Kierkegaard’s view the “Situation” opens up through irony: now there is infinite and eternal “space” around the given finite and temporal actuality and the drama of life may receive deeper meaning. Which meaning it will receive depends on the quality of the imagination, passion, and will that the individual has, but also on historical events that take place beyond the proper sphere of the subject.
Some of the different ways of situating oneself amount to ways of living poetically. In *The Concept of Irony* Kierkegaard refers with “living poetically” to the ethical-religious and to the Christian ways of life. With this he challenges the claim of the Romantic ironists that their aesthetic way of life is the truly poetic way of life. Kierkegaard writes:

“By “living poetically” irony understood something other and something more than what any sensible [fornuftigt] person who has any respect for a human being’s worth, any sense for the original in a human being, understands by this phrase. It did not take this to mean the artistic earnestness that comes to the aid of the divine in man, that mutely and quietly listens to the voice of what is distinctive in individuality, detects its movements in order to let it really be available in the individual and to let the whole individuality develop harmoniously into a pliable form rounded off in itself.

Here we have the ethical-religious alternative for the Romantic ideal and immediately after it we get the Christian one:

It did not understand it to be what the pious Christian thinks of when he becomes aware that life is an upbringing [Opdragelse], an education, which...is specifically supposed to develop the seeds God himself has placed in man, since the Christian knows himself as the person that has reality for God. Here, in fact, the Christian comes to the aid of God, becomes, so to speak, his co-worker in completing the good work God himself has begun.49

Whereas the Romantic ironist attempts “to compose himself poetically” (*at digte sig selv*) the Christian “lets himself be poetically composed” (*at lade sig digte*).50 An important difference between these two alternatives is how the individual situates himself into his context:

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49 *CI, 280 / SVI XIII, 352. (Translation slightly altered.)
50 Ibid.
An individual who lets himself be poetically composed does have a
definite given context into which he has to fit and thus does not be-
come a word without meaning because it is wrenched out of its asso-
ciations. But for the ironist, this context...has no validity, and since it
is not his concern to form himself in such a way that he fits into his
environment, then the environment must be formed to fit him—in
other words, he poetically composes not only himself but he poeti-
cally composes his environment also... In so doing, he continually
collides with the actuality to which he belongs. Therefore it becomes
important for him to suspend what is constitutive in actuality, that
which orders and supports it: that is, morality [Moral] and ethics
[Sædelighed].

But, according to Kierkegaard, in the end such suspension does
not open for the ironist a poetic existence. The Romantic ironist
negates historical actuality and lives in a totally hypothetical way.
But this abolishes continuity from his life, and what is left is a suc-
cession of contrasting moods. This dissonant succession does not
have a high aesthetic value, but is characterized by boredom in-
stead. Thus, the attempt of the Romantics to live poetically re-
results in the loss of that which is genuinely poetic in life.

Hence, according to Kierkegaard, the only way to live poeti-
cally is to situate oneself into given historical actuality in the reli-
gious way. Kierkegaard argues for this position by claiming that it
is the inner infinity that makes one’s life poetical. “To live poeti-
cally...is to live infinitely,” and only the religious “infinitizes actu-
ality for me.” Poetry is “a kind of reconciliation” in that it “opens
up a higher actuality, expands and transfigures the imperfect into
the perfect and thereby assuages the deep pain that wants to make
everything dark.” But this is not the true reconciliation, for “it
does not reconcile me with the actuality in which I am living; no

51 CI, 283 / SV1 XIII, 354.
transubstantiation of the given actuality takes place....” Only the religious is able to bring about a genuine reconciliation of the ideal and the actual in actual life. One consequence of this is that a poet does not necessarily live poetically; another is that any ordinary human being can live poetically, if he truly wants to:

The poet does not live poetically by creating a poetic work, for if it does not stand in any conscious and inward relation to him, his life does not have the inner infinity that is an absolute condition for living poetically...but he lives poetically only when he himself is oriented and thus integrated in the age in which he lives, is positively free in the actuality to which he belongs. But anyone can live poetically in this way.

As in the following we shall take the ideal of living poetically as our key for understanding how the Kierkegaardian subject relates to his situation, it is good to underscore here that living poetically does not equal an aesthetic way of life, say, a life that constantly seeks aesthetic enjoyment or a Bohemian life characterized by unlimited artistic freedom and heroic disregard for bourgeois actuality. In the writings that follow The Concept of Irony, Kierkegaard criticizes the poet-existence repeatedly. But this critique does not invalidate the ideal of living poetically. The poet-existence Kierkegaard criticizes already in The Concept of Irony, and this critique goes hand in hand with upholding living poetically as an existential ideal. As Joel D. S. Rasmussen has pointed out, the critique of the poet concerns the neglect to actualize the ideal: a poet typically sings in praise of the ideal, but neglects to

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put it in practice.\textsuperscript{57} But the demand to live poetically in an ethical-religious manner is a corrective precisely to this aberrant, escapist tendency.

In Kierkegaard’s vocabulary the expression “living poetically” actually refers to the ethical-religious and Christian ways of life. As defined in The Concept of Irony, the core of Kierkegaard’s notion of living poetically is thus

- becoming brought up by God, while
- assuming ethical-religiously one’s place and role in the historical actuality.

It is this meaning that we shall hold onto in what follows. The point to be made is that while the term “living poetically” disappears from Kierkegaard’s vocabulary after Either/Or, the notion, as here defined, still informs his thought and practice. Kierkegaard’s depiction of the ideal Christian life changes on the way, so that while in The Concept of Irony he focuses on the infinite, inward enjoyment,\textsuperscript{58} in later writings suffering in the world becomes increasingly emphasized.\textsuperscript{59} However, even the Christian “witness to the truth,” who represents the highest ideal for the late Kierkegaard, still keeps living in the world right to the end and does not escape the world, for example, in a monastery. He still “has a defi-

\textsuperscript{57} Rasmussen 2005, 149–177.
\textsuperscript{58} CI, 297–298 / SV1 XIII, 367.
\textsuperscript{59} Suffering is a major theme already in the earlier, “aesthetic”, pseudonymous authorship that culminates in the extensive discussion on suffering in Concluding Unscientific Postscript (CUP, 431–525 / SV1 VII, 374–458). But even more so in the later writings, where it finally becomes maintained that “in this world the truth is victorious only by suffering, by getting the worst of it (PC, 193–194 / SV1 XII, 179–180).” (On this subject, see Westphal 1992.) On the other hand, it is true that side by side with the suffering in the world, the infinite joy and consolation in inwardness become emphasized in Kierkegaard’s later writings. (See Bohlin 1918, 310–312, and Walsh 2005, 113–148.) It is this inward enjoyment, the infinite religious enjoyment, that Kierkegaard emphasizes in his dissertation. (See the reference in the preceding footnote.)
nite given context” into which he has to fit in order to fulfill his task in the world, and the form that his martyrdom takes must accord with the historical situation in which he finds himself. Similarly, the late Kierkegaard still keeps hold of the idea that “life is an upbringing,” although he now makes a clear distinction between the upbringing that prepares for the worldly life and the upbringing that prepares for death and afterlife.

But why use the expression “living poetically,” if Kierkegaard’s idea is just the old Lutheran one that one becomes brought up by God, while assuming ethical-religiously one’s role and place in the world? Because the expression neatly captures the way the Kierkegaardian subject situates himself into changeable historical actuality. Even in Kierkegaard’s later writings an analogy remains between living poetically and living religiously. The attempt to actualize the ideal in the concrete form and to make the eternal and the infinite present in the changeable and finite existence are common to both. So are the sense of freedom, uncertainty, and the sense of uniqueness of individual life, the central role given to passion and imagination, the tendency to understand life in terms of a drama, and certain imprudence in contrast to the reasonable and calculating bourgeois and philosophical models of life. Therefore, “living poetically” remains an appropriate term to capture the central characteristics of the religious way of life as depicted by Kierkegaard, and to distinguish it from the more “reasonable” alternatives he sets it against.

In a sense I steal the expressions “situation” and “living poetically” from Kierkegaard and use them as technical terms to formulate, on the basis of his writings, an alternative to the commonsense and philosophical ways to orient oneself in life. But, it seems to me, there is support for this project in Kierkegaard’s own writ-

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60 In the modern world “martyrs must become long-distance martyrs” and “the battle must be against prudence and cleverness (JP 3, 2661 / Pap. X 3 A 511).”

ing, so that I may maintain that the project is faithful to Kierkegaard’s intentions. Indeed, if I am not mistaken, it is precisely against, on the one hand, the commonsense philistine, and on the other, the rationalistic philosophical models of life that Kierkegaard defends the ideal of living poetically in *The Concept of Irony*. Kierkegaard claims in his dissertation that every human being has an inalienable claim upon living poetically, but only a religious person is actually able to live this way. I take this claim as Kierkegaard’s authorization for the investigation at hand that aims to recapture the problem of what it would mean in the modern age to live poetically in a religious manner.

To sum up, Kierkegaard understands human situatedness on the analogy of drama. According to Kierkegaard, it is up to human individuals how they situate themselves, and in certain cases they live poetically, in certain cases not. According to Kierkegaard, only individuals who live religiously are truly living poetically. The problem that the following exegesis of Kierkegaard’s texts aims at is whether it is still defensible, whether it is even an obligation, to live poetically in the situation we find ourselves, that is, in the modern age.

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62 See the subdivision 1.2 below.
63 CI, 299 / SVI XIII, 368.
64 CI, 297–299 / SVI XIII, 368.
The following eight chapters contain an analytical exegesis of Kierkegaard’s dissertation, his pseudonymous works, and his texts on his work as an author. Their purpose is to show that the ideal of living poetically makes itself present throughout Kierkegaard’s authorship and to give shape and content to this ideal. At the same time, they try to show how the existing individual that makes its appearance in Concluding Unscientific Postscript is situated in the context of historical and social actuality in the different spheres of existence. Of the works to be treated The Concept of Irony shows how aesthetic and ironic existence take place in the historical and social world. Either/Or, Part II, depicts the ethical-religious existence of a human individual in history and society. Philosophical Fragments and The Concept of Anxiety describe how the Christian truth is revealed to the concrete individual through his sinful history. Practice in Christianity delineates the practical implications of Christian truth for the individual who lives in the modern society. All of these works, it will be argued, are informed by the ideal of living poetically. That Kierkegaard also tried to hold onto this ideal in his own life is shown by the exegesis of his On My Work as an Author and The Point of View for My Work as an Author.

Kierkegaard forms his conception of living poetically in his dissertation, The Concept of Irony (Om Begrebet Ironi med stadigt Hensyn til Socrates, 1841), by reflecting the ironic activity of the Romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), and Karl Solger (1780–1819). According to Kierkegaard, living poetically was the ideal of these Romantic ironists, who attempted to raise themselves above the given actuality with the help of irony in order to reach the poetic sphere not only
in art, but in life itself. In his dissertation Kierkegaard gives his analysis of the Romantic ideal of living poetically and then formulates his own ethical-religious counter ideal. Since irony opens up the modern modes of living poetically and is an essential constituent in them, we shall begin with an analysis of irony and its break with immediacy in *The Concept of Irony*.\(^{65}\)

### 1.1 Irony and Immediacy

Kierkegaard notes that the word “irony” is usually translated as “dissimulation.” For example, Theophrastus defined irony as “false and fraudulent dissimulation and concealment.” However, on a more general level, what is at stake in irony is the discrepancy between phenomenon and essence.\(^{66}\) Kierkegaard maintains that “a quality that permeates all irony” is that “the phenomenon is not the same as the essence but the opposite of the essence.” Dissimulation is just the act that carries out the discrepancy between essence and phenomenon: in an ironic figure of speech the spoken words (the phenomenon) does not correspond to the thought, to

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\(^{65}\) A good introduction to *The Concept of Irony* is Grunnet 1987, which also goes through its historical background in the ideas of Schlegel, Tieck, and Solger. The historical background gets a more exact and thorough treatment, however, in Söderquist 2007. For an article that also considers Kierkegaard’s sources, see also Behler 1997. For a collection of more constructive and philosophical essays, see Perkins 2001. Philosophically the most rigorous and penetrating study is, perhaps, still Pivčević 1960. Perhaps it is even too rigorous and too philosophical, since Pivčević refuses to understand Kierkegaard’s irony as an essential ingredient in a religious project of living poetically that builds on faith. Instead, he sees Kierkegaard as falling prey to “the inversion of irony” and, in consequence, to nothingness and isolation. (See Pivčević 1960, 133–137.) In the following exegesis I try to present the evidence that shows that the judgment of Pivčević is incorrect and that Kierkegaard’s project in its own ethical-religious way fills up the nothingness that faces the subject and helps him overcome his isolation.

\(^{66}\) CI, 255 / SVI XIII, 330.
the meaning (the essence). Moreover, in order to comprehend irony one must consider also its significance for its user. For the subject irony is negatively liberating. While direct speech acts tie the subject to the intersubjective world, irony liberates: under the cover of ironic signs “the subject is negatively free”; free from its bonds to the intersubjective and phenomenal world. Through irony the subject may thus free himself from the restraint in which the continuity of life’s conditions hold him and enjoy again his freedom. Considering the given phenomenal actuality as a rule does not match the actuality that the subject comprehends in his thought, there is always room for irony. And the more the subject becomes aware of this, the more possibility there is that irony becomes a permanent position (Standpunkt) of the subject and a stance towards the given actuality in its totality. It is this irony, i.e. irony as a mode of human spirit, that Kierkegaard treats in his dissertation.

In his dissertation Kierkegaard attempts to develop “the concept of irony” in a Hegelian manner. “Concept” is here to be understood roughly as a Hegelian concept: it signifies a mode of human spirit that, indirectly, makes its appearance in the phenomenal world. As a mode of human spirit, that is, as a total standpoint a human spirit may take, irony may be defined as infinite absolute negativity. Hegel characterized the standpoint of Solger thus in his Lectures on Aesthetics. Kierkegaard picks up the characterization and explains it in the following way: irony is negativity, because it only negates; it is infinite, because it negates all that is finite; it is absolute, because it negates by something higher. An ironist destroys the given actuality by the given actual-

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70 CI, 254 / SV1 XIII, 328–329.
71 Aesthetics I, 68 / Jub. 12, 105.
ity itself and makes thereby room for the new principle to come to determine actuality. The new principle is present in an ironist *kata dynamin*, potentially, or as possibility. An ironist negates a finite form of speech (or a form of art or life) with another finite form. But while the ironic activity negates the actual, it is not just simply destructive. In this activity there is present, in the form of possibility, something higher that transcends the actual. Although in itself pure negativity, irony receives its force from this hidden positive principle that works in it *kata dynamin*, potentially. An ironist becomes as if intoxicated by the power of infinite possibility. In a fully developed irony, he also becomes aware that his own position is the position of irony. Through irony he both anticipates an ideal possibility and judges the given actuality that turns out to fall short of the ideal. The he uses irony deliberately as a way to lift himself above the given actuality. Face-to-face with the given actuality, he now feels his power, his validity, and significance as the subject, and with the help of conscious irony he saves himself “out of the relativity in which the given actuality wants to hold him.” This way Kierkegaard makes irony into the first stage in the becoming of the subject. In irony the subject starts to become conscious of its potentialities. Irony is the first and most abstract determination of subjectivity, i.e. the appearance of irony goes side by side with the emergence of active and independent subjectivity.\(^72\)

As a mode of human spirit irony made its first appearance when active and independent subjectivity entered the world in the guise of Socrates. Concepts have their history, notes Kierkegaard, in (ironic) agreement with Hegel, and claims that in order to comprehend “the concept of irony,” we should also, therefore, observe and philosophically comprehend its first appearance in

\(^{72}\) *CI*, 261–264 / *SVI* XIII, 335–337.
Socrates. In his dissertation Kierkegaard puts Socratic irony into its cultural historical context. Following Hegel again, Kierkegaard pictures the old Greek culture as a culture of nature-like immediate harmony. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*) Hegel had characterized such a culture with the term “beautiful individuality.” In his dissertation Kierkegaard uses Hegel’s terminology, and his overall conception of the old Greek culture seems to derive from these lectures by Hegel. In order to comprehend Kierkegaard’s conception, then, we should have a brief look at this text by Hegel. All the more so, since Hegel gives a much more unified and detailed view of life in pre-Socratic Greece than Kierkegaard does.

Hegel compares the Greek spirit with a plastic artist that forms a stone into a work of art: out of the given materials the Greek spirit forms freely beautiful works of art to express itself in an individual way. What is natural is transformed into spiritual. For the Greek spirit perceptible forms are only signs, envelopes in which spirit manifests itself. Hegel describes how the Greeks listened (*lauschen*) to the phenomena of nature and surmised their significance in mythological representations. For example, they wondered what the babble of the springs might mean and found the answer in the form of the Naiads. Then later, out of this image, their fantasy produced the more exalted figures of the Muses. Such poetic presentation and interpretation of phenomena was the manner in which the Greek spirit related itself to nature. Similar activity also characterized the interpretation of what took place in

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73 *CI*, 9–10 / *SV* I XIII, 105–106. The agreement with Hegel may be ironic, for it enables Kierkegaard to establish a connection between the prototypal philosopher that Hegel held in honor and the Romantic ironists that he condemned and did not want to understand. According to this interpretation, there is quite a bit of irony in Kierkegaard’s enhancement of Hegel’s ideas in *The Concept of Irony*. I will interpret Kierkegaard’s strategy in *The Concept of Irony* along these lines below.
men themselves: the dreams and fits of mental disorder were given a meaning by an interpreter, *mantis*. And when Achilles, in the beginning of *Iliad*, loses his temper and is about to attack Agamemnon, but then controls himself and reflects his situation, this is depicted by the poet as an interference of Pallas Athene, the goddess of wisdom and reflection.\(^7^4\)

According to Hegel, this principle of “beautiful individuality,” the free transformation of natural into spiritual, was the middle point of the Greek character, which then realized itself in subjective, objective, and political spheres. Man himself was perfected in sports and arts into subjective work of art. In gods and deities the spirit objectified itself and grasped itself as objective. However, since in its Greek form spirit was still bound to the perceptible material and free only on conditions given by it, these Greek gods, too, were still molded out of natural materials. They were always connected with particular phenomena of nature, and still represented the powers residing in it while they also represented forces operating within human practices. According to Hegel, they were also considered to be present in person in their material appearances. Thus the eternal peace and the clarity of thought which characterize the statue of Apollo were not symbols of the god: it was Apollo himself who appeared in the marble.\(^7^5\)

According to Hegel, the Greek spirit was aware of its freedom as it gave shape to its productions, but at the same time it stood in awe in front of these images and visions, this Zeus in Olympia and this Pallas of the Acropolis. While these gods were made by man, at the same time they manifested the eternal truth, the powers of the spirit as it is in and for itself.\(^7^6\) Because the gods emerged out of finitude and were bound to it, they were of an accidental and particular nature, and since all spiritual substance was invested in

\(^7^4\) *Phil. of Hist.*, 233–237 / *Jub.* 11, 308–312.
\(^7^5\) *Phil. of Hist.*, 238–246 / *Jub.* 11, 313–323.
\(^7^6\) *Phil. of Hist.*, 239 / *Jub.* 11, 315.
them, it followed that the unity that was posited above them remained abstract. This unity was the all-encompassing destiny, *Fatum*, which was without form and meaning and which, being devoid of spirit, had an oppressive character. The unity as God, as one Spirit, was unknown to the Greeks, notes Hegel.\(^{77}\)

The subjective and objective works of art were united in the political work of art, the state (*polis*). The spirit of the state was a universal spirit, but was at the same time also the self-conscious spirit of particular individuals, the citizens. For the Greeks, democracy was a natural constitutional form in which freedom of the individual was in harmony with common practices and institutions, the substantiality (*das Substantielle*) of the state. Hegel says that laws were considered to be founded on just and moral grounds and were recognized as positive.\(^{78}\) In other words the laws were recognized by the citizens as their own and as expressing their will in an adequate way. This, however, did not prevent the Greeks respecting and venerating their laws and practices as they did the images of their gods: laws were recognized as created by man, but at the same time as works of spirit expressing that which is true and essential in itself. Athene, the goddess, was Athens itself, i.e. the actual and concrete spirit of its citizens. And just as the gods were concrete, so were the city-states. It was not the state as an abstract ideal that determined the activity of the citizens. The object of their activity was their country in its living particularity—this actual Athens, this Sparta, these temples, these forms of social life, this group of fellow-citizens, these manners and customs. The Greeks lived for their countries without further reflection; the moral disposition was there in them as a habit, unquestioned and unchallenged. Laws were observed because they were laws and they were held valid in the same manner as the laws of

\(^{77}\) *Phil. of Hist.*, 246 / *Jub.* 11, 322–323.

\(^{78}\) *Phil. of Hist.*, 251 / *Jub.* 11, 327–328.
nature. The enemy of immediacy, reflection and subjectivity, had not yet made its entrance into habits and practices.\textsuperscript{79} The substantial ethical life (\textit{die Substantielle Sittlichkeit}) was not yet corrupted by thought.\textsuperscript{80}

In his dissertation, Kierkegaard refers twice to the principle of “beautiful individuality,”\textsuperscript{81} and in general he shares Hegel’s conception of the Greek culture. Kierkegaard writes: “In the old Greek culture, the individual was by no means free in this sense [he did not have moral freedom], but was confined in the substantial ethical life (\textit{substantielle Sædelighed}); he had not yet taken himself out of, separated himself from, this immediate relationship, still did not know himself.”\textsuperscript{82} The Hegelian concept of substantiality comes up repeatedly in the dissertation and appears even in its ninth thesis: “Socrates drove all his contemporaries out of substantiality as if naked from a shipwreck, undermined actuality, envisioned ideality in the distance, touched it, but did not take possession of it.”\textsuperscript{83} This substantiality Kierkegaard characterizes along the lines drawn by Hegel. He writes that in “happy Greece” essence was at one with phenomena as an immediate qualification of nature (\textit{som umiddelbar Naturbestemmelse}).\textsuperscript{84} The “beautiful individuality,” being to some extent a product of nature and having in itself the sensate as an essential element, was characterized by a certain equanimity and harmonious unity.\textsuperscript{85} Gods and deities were concrete; as concrete individuals they took part in all aspects of human life.\textsuperscript{86} Individuals did not question the practices and

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Phil. of Hist.}, 239 and 250–253 / \textit{Jub.} 11, 315 and 328–331.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Phil. of Hist.}, 267 / \textit{Jub.} 11, 342.

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{CI}, 192 and 213 / \textit{SV1} XIII, 273 and 292.

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{CI}, 228 / \textit{SV1} XIII, 306.

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{CI}, 6 / \textit{SV1} XIII, 99.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{CI}, 212 n / \textit{SV1} XIII, 291 n.

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{CI}, 213 / \textit{SV1} XIII, 292.

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{CI}, 160–161 / \textit{SV1} XIII, 245–246.
traditions of their communities, but actively took part in political life, such as it was. That life might be full of contradictions went their immediate consciousness unnoticed—secure and confident their consciousness relied upon what it received from the past, like a sacred treasure.87

Such, according to Kierkegaard, was the state of Greek consciousness before the age of reflection had begun. Kierkegaard talks about the spell under which human life lay within the "form of substantiality." 88 As was mentioned above, according to Hegel the political work of art united the subjective and objective works of art. This implies that the substantial ethical life (die Substanzielle Sittlichkeit) included man’s relation to himself and to gods. Individuals had not yet separated themselves from their community and also gods were communal property, gods of the state received from fathers.89 Kierkegaard shares Hegel’s view on the all penetrating “substantial actuality of the state.”90 He writes about “the primeval forest of substantial consciousness” which flourished in the minds of individuals.91

It was into this primeval forest that Socratic irony opened up brand new vistas. According to Kierkegaard, the principle of Soc-

87 CI, 204 / SVI XIII, 284.
88 CI, 171 / SVI XIII, 254.
89 Would this imply that in a certain sense there were no personal god-relationships? To be sure, for example the heroes in Homer had personal relationships with gods: for example, Ulysses with Pallas Athene and Poseidon. But then again everybody could see that he was the favorite of Athene, he was so clever, and everybody knew that Poseidon had something against him, as the sea would not let him return to Ithaca. This could be compared to the status of private property in Greece: there was no legalized private property in the modern sense of the term. Consider how the suitors are eating Telemachos’ property in the first books of Odyssea and how in Athens the wealthier were obliged to finance the public undertakings.
90 CI, 178 / SVI XIII, 261.
91 CI, 190 / SVI XIII, 272.
Chapter 1: The Concept of Irony

rates was irony. As “infinite absolute negativity,” irony was the negation of the principle of “beautiful individuality” and the substantial immediacy. It dissolved the harmonious unity of the spiritual and natural, of essence and phenomena, by bringing out the discrepancy between the actual and the ideal. By doing this, it liberated the Greek consciousness from the relativism characteristic to it and made it aware of the existence of something that is in and for itself.

The practice of reflecting on existing things had already gained ground in Greek culture through the activity of the Sophists. The Sophists, writes Kierkegaard, represent knowledge separating itself in its motley multiplicity from substantial ethical life by means of awakening reflection. In early Greek culture everything was true: the actual had absolute validity; the immediate consciousness relied upon what it received from the past like a sacred treasure. But life is in truth full of contradictions and reflection discovers this at once. In Sophistry reflection was awakened and the reflection of the Sophists shook the foundations of everything. However, Sophistry was able to lull reflection to sleep again with reasons. The grounds and reasons that the Sophists gave for phenomena were only of a provisional nature, valid only for a moment (Øieblik). But the next moment never came for Sophistry, because it lived in the moment and lacked a comprehensive consciousness and the eternal moment in which it would have had to give an account of the whole.\(^{92}\) What Socrates did with the Sophists, then, was to give them the next moment, the moment in which the momentarily true dissolved into nothing—in Socratic irony the negativity of the infinite devoured the positivity of the finite.\(^{93}\)

As such, the infinite negativity irony of Socrates was an antidote both to the relativism of the Sophists and to that of tradi-

\(^{92}\) CI, 201–205 / SVI XIII, 283–285.
\(^{93}\) CI, 213 / SVI XIII, 293.
tional Greek culture, but not the ultimate cure. Kierkegaard writes that irony is healthiness insofar as it rescues the soul from the snares of relativity, but it is a sickness insofar as it cannot bear the absolute except in the form of nothing. Socrates liberated the Greek consciousness from the relativism characteristic to it by making it aware of the existence of something that is in and for itself. But Socrates was himself ignorant of that which lies at the ground of all being, the eternal, the divine—he knew that it was, but he did not know what it was. He had the idea only as boundary. Socrates advanced the universal only as the negative. He had “that which is in and for itself” (det ångikvarende) only in the form of nothing. Through his irony reality became nothing by way of the absolute, but the absolute was in its turn nothing.

The appearance of irony goes hand in hand with the emergence of an active and independent subjectivity that maintains its right of self-determination in a culture bound to concrete forms and traditions. According to Kierkegaard the position of Socrates was that of subjectivity, of inwardness. Socrates had realized how the subject occupies the key position with regard to actuality: in order to have validity, everything must first be drawn before the forum of thought, and there receive its confirmation. In principle, this realization of Socrates opened up the possibility of taking personal responsibility for one’s actions. However, by assigning the determination of man’s actions to insight and by positing the individual as capable of final moral decision, Socrates in effect damaged the substantial ethical life in Athens. Kierkegaard claims in his dissertation that Socrates was indeed irresponsible as a teacher of the youth. In the city-state of Athens Socrates became an ironic outsider, who could not construct a positive relationship to the estab-

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94 CI, 77 / SV1 XIII, 170.
95 CI, 169 / SV1 XIII, 253.
96 CI, 233 / SV1 XIII, 310.
97 CI, 236 / SV1 XIII, 312.
lished order. By bringing young people into the same situation, he actually did evil.\(^98\) Kierkegaard describes how Socrates seduced the youth:

He discussed some subject that was personally important to them... He became their confidant without their quite knowing how it had happened... And then, when all the bonds of their prejudices were loosened... then the relation culminated in the meaningful moment, in the brief silvery gleam that instantly illuminated the world of their consciousness, when he turned everything upside down for them at once, as quickly as a glance of the eye \([\text{\OE}eblik]\) and for as long as a blink of the eye, when everything is changed for them \(en\ atomô, en\ rhipê ofíhalmou\) [1 Cor 15:52]... By means of his questions, he quietly sawed through for toppling the primeval forest of substantial consciousness, and when everything was ready—look, then all these formations vanished, and the eyes of the soul delighted in a vista such as they had never seen before... \[I\]n the same instant the relation had reached its peak. He did not give more, and while the young man now felt inseparably bound to Socrates, the relation changed so that, as Alcibiades aptly describes it [in Plato’s \textit{Symposium}, 222 b], Socrates became the beloved rather than the lover... [He did not] assume any real responsibility for the later lives of his students, and here again Alcibiades provides us with an example \textit{instar omnium}.\(^99\)

Echoing Hegel, Kierkegaard writes that true \textit{earnestness} is possible only in a totality in which the subject feels the task to be something that he has not assigned to himself but that has been assigned to him. But such totality Socrates did not have. Consequently, his virtues, as exceptional as they were, do not qualify as genuine virtues—their character was too arbitrary, they lacked true earnestness.\(^100\)

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\(^100\) \textit{CI}, 234–235 and 229 n / \textit{SV} I XIII, 309–311 and 307 n.
Irony, as separation of the ideal from the actual and of the self-conscious individual from immediacy, made Socrates disparage every objective qualification of his life. Kierkegaard writes: “The objective power of state, its claims upon the activity of the individual, the laws, the courts—everything loses its absolute validity to him. He divested himself of all of them as imperfect forms.”

The whole existence became alien to Socrates, and he in turn became alien to existence. Kierkegaard writes that Socrates was not a good citizen and notes that it is obvious to everyone that he was not a good husband, either. Furthermore, in defining virtue as knowledge Socrates neglected not only the concrete actuality of the city-state, but also that of the soul. As Aristotle points out, and Hegel confirms, even if virtue as the universal begins with thought, virtue is not only thought or knowledge. What is essential in virtue is character, i.e. that man is virtuous, and that involves heart, temperament, etc. The Socratic definition of virtue as knowledge turns a blind eye to the irrational part of the soul. In a word, Socrates lacked respect for and consideration of the actual. Kierkegaard agrees with Hegel that the condemnation of Socrates by the people of Athens was, from its point of view, completely justified. But unlike Hegel, Kierkegaard does not see Socrates as a tragic hero, who sacrificed his life in a tragic conflict, where two equally justified principles or morals met each other (the natural morality and the right of consciousness). According to the interpretation that Kierkegaard presents in *The Concept of Irony*, Socrates did not represent any positive principle. Instead, he

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101 CI, 194 / SVI XIII, 275.
102 CI, 196 / SVI XIII, 277.
103 CI, 181 and 192 n / SVI XIII, 263 and 274 n.
104 CI, 228–230 / SVI XIII, 306–308.
lacked positivity altogether; his position was infinite absolute negativity.\textsuperscript{106}

In his dissertation Kierkegaard only emphasizes the negative side of Socrates’ existence and as a result Socrates comes out as a thoroughbred ironist. With his irony Socrates opened up the gap between the actual and the ideal, and alienated the individuals that were affected by his irony from their community and its forms of life. What was supposed to be absolutely certain and determinate for men (laws, customs etc.) brought these individuals now in conflict with themselves. Socrates himself did not have any guidelines as to how this conflict could be mediated or reconciled and he did not bother himself with the problem, either. He was quite satisfied with himself in his abstract hovering between the actual and the ideal. In other words, he was an ironist.\textsuperscript{107}

The irony of Socrates is clearly discernible in Plato’s early works, such as the *Symposium*, *Protagoras*, *Phaedo*, and *Apology*.\textsuperscript{108} Irony, which gives up the concrete but gives nothing in its stead, manifests itself in the method that Socrates uses in these texts. Essentially the method amounts to “simplifying life’s complexities by leading them back to an ever more abstract abbreviation.” Socrates makes ironic questions that detach both the subject and the ideas from the complications created by life and by the Sophists.\textsuperscript{109} But the intention of Socrates in making his questions was, in the spirit of irony, only to show that the thought has before itself only nothingness.\textsuperscript{110} Thus, the philosophy of Socrates leads inevitably into *abstractness* and, further, into *nothingness*. First Socrates makes his companions hanker after abstract ideas, but next these

\textsuperscript{106} CI, 231–237 / SVI XIII, 308–312.

\textsuperscript{107} CI, 127–128, 154, 204, and 212–214 / SVI XIII, 213, 239, 284, and 292–293.

\textsuperscript{108} CI, 41–96 / SVI XIII, 136–184.

\textsuperscript{109} CI, 32 / SVI XIII, 127–128.

\textsuperscript{110} CI, 36–37 / SVI XIII, 131–133.
ideas tend to vanish in his philosophy into nothing. For example, in the *Symposium*, love is disengaged more and more from the accidental concretions, such as beautiful persons and deeds, and turned toward the abstract beauty that it fundamentally desires. But this abstract beauty and its implications with regard to the concrete are left completely indeterminate. Socrates “starts with the concrete and arrives at the most abstract and there, where the investigation should begin, he stops.”

Similarly, in the *Phaedo* the thought rises higher and higher to reach the immortal ideas, but ends up ascending into sheer abstract nothing. In the dialogue the meaning of the philosopher’s life is seen to be the successive dying away from the sensual world. But, on the other hand, the purely abstract essences as such (magnitude, health, strength, etc.), which the philosopher is after, tend to become nothing in their contrast to the concrete. And while the eternal soul is understood just as abstractly as the pure essence of the things, it also comes to be nothing. However, this conclusion does not bother Socrates at all; on the contrary, he receives ironic satisfaction from the resulting ignorance and from the infinite openness of everything. Such satisfaction is characteristic to irony. For an ironist the eternal ideas never become more than the boundary of the dialectic, but for him that is enough. The relation to the unknown infinity releases him from the bonds of finite actuality, so that he may oscillate between the actual and the ideal whichever way he pleases:

Continually in the process of leading the phenomenon up to the idea (the dialectical activity), the individual is thrust back or flees back into actuality; but actuality itself has only the validity of continually being the occasion for wanting to go beyond actuality—yet without its taking place; whereas the individual takes the *molimina* [efforts]

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111 *CI*, 45–46 / *SV* XIII, 140–141.
112 *CI*, 65–69 / *SV* XIII, 158–162.
113 *CI*, 78–79 / *SV* XIII, 170–171.
of this subjectivity back into himself, incloses them within himself in a personal satisfaction; but this position is precisely that of irony.\(^{114}\) In practice this light-minded self-satisfaction, which the ironist receives from his ability to abstract himself away from both the actuality and ideality, amounts to irresponsibility.

But, even if irresponsible, the irony of Socrates played an important role in the development of world spirit: a whole new development took its beginning from Socrates. His life had this enormous meaning because the new principle was present in him *kata dynamin*, potentially, in the form of possibility.\(^{115}\) It was this new principle that worked through him and gave his negating activity actual importance: “[I]t was not actuality in general that he negated; it was the given actuality at particular time, the substantial actuality as it was in Greece, and what his irony was demanding was the actuality of subjectivity, of ideality.”\(^{116}\) Like the law of the Jews, explains Kierkegaard, the irony of Socrates was a demand, but an enormous demand in as much as it rejected the given reality and demanded ideality. In that period of world history, this demand was authentic (sand) and thus Socratic irony had world-historical authority.\(^{117}\) Kierkegaard writes that as a result of Socrates’ activity, the pagan gods took flight and took the fullness with them, and what remained was man as a form, which was to receive the fullness into itself.\(^{118}\) “Yet this, of course, is only a moment of transition,” explains Kierkegaard. “In many ways, man was still on the right road, and therefore what Augustine says about sin may be said about this: *beata culpa* [happy fault].\(^{119}\)

\(^{114}\) *CI*, 154 / *SV* XIII, 239.

\(^{115}\) *CI*, 214 / *SV* XIII, 293.

\(^{116}\) *CI*, 271 / *SV* XIII, 343.

\(^{117}\) *CI*, 213 and 213 n / *SV* XIII, 292–293 and 293 n.

\(^{118}\) *CI*, 171 / *SV* XIII, 255.

heavenly hosts of gods rose from the earth and vanished from mortal sight, but this disappearance was the condition for a deeper relationship.  

How is the new, deeper relationship to the divine built up, then? What fills the form of the man that irony leaves empty? Kierkegaard refers to “subjective thinking”, to the speculation that remained purely subjective and that makes its appearance in the later dialogues of Plato such as the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*. This Platonic speculation desires fullness and presupposes an immediate unity of thought and being. The preliminary reconciliation with the gods seems to already occur in the *Timaeus* where the good God, without any envy, wants to create a good world in his picture. However, it is obvious that Kierkegaard does not consider the “abstract dialectic” of Plato as the ultimate, positive reconciliation of the temporal with the eternal in his dissertation, but rather as a way to lose oneself in subjectivity, in ideality. Namely, Kierkegaard suggests that Plato could not understand, not to say master, the Socratic irony; instead, he was its enthusiastic victim.

In his dissertation Kierkegaard also presents a scheme in which irony in its negativity points forward to what he calls “reflective individuality.” In happy Greece, essence and phenomenon were united in an immediate, natural way. The “beautiful individuality” was to a certain extent a product of nature and had in itself the sensate as an essential element. This harmonious unity was dis-

134); vol. 17, col. 1705. Here Augustine praises the fall of man: “O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere redemptorem (O happy fault, which has deserved to have such and so mighty a Redeemer)!”


121 CI, 122–125 with 36–37 / SVI XIII, 208–210 with 131–133.

122 CI, 173 n / SVI XIII, 256 n.

turbed by the absolute negativity of irony. The “reflective individuality,” on the other hand, negates the phenomenal in order to posit by means of this negation. For the “reflective individuality” every natural qualification is a task, and through and out of life’s dialectic emerges the transfigured individuality as the personality who at every moment is victorious and yet is still fighting. This “reflective individuality” might refer to the philosophy of Plato, but reminds one more of the principle at work in German idealistic philosophy. But Kierkegaard could not have thought that it was the reflecting of reflection begun by Kant and continued by Fichte and others that brought gods back on the earth. He criticizes Kant and his followers precisely for squandering the rich dogmatic resources that they had inherited:

It was in Kant, to call to mind only what is generally known, that modern speculative thought, feeling itself mature and come of age, became tired of the guardianship in which it had lived hitherto under dogmatism and, like the prodigal son, went to its father and demanded that he divide and share the inheritance with it. The outcome of this division of inheritance is well known, and also that speculation did not have to go abroad to squander its resources, because there was no wealth there in the first place. The more the I in criticism became absorbed in contemplation of the I, the leaner and leaner the I became, until it ended with becoming a ghost, immortal like Aurora’s husband.

In other words, emancipating itself from all historically given dogmatic material, the I becomes an empty form in idealistic philosophy just as it did in Socratic irony.

However, in his dissertation Kierkegaard also refers to Christ as the “fullness” that is the dialectical opposite to the nothingness of Socratic irony. He notes that whereas Socrates was invisible to

\[124 CI, 212–213 and 212 n / SV’I XIII, 292 and 292 n. \]

\[125 CI, 272 / SV’I XIII, 344. (Translation slightly altered.) \]
his age and could only be misunderstood by his words, Christ was there to be seen (Luke 10:24), even to be touched by hands (1 John 1:1), and one could always take him at his word. In another passage he notes that whereas “the ironic personality is only the outline of personality” and its “relation to the world is a continuous misrelation to the world,” in Christ the fullness of deity (Guddommens Fylde) resides and his relation to the world is “so absolutely real relation that the Church is conscious of itself as members of his body.” It seems clear, then, that the new, deeper relationship to the divine is built on Christ and that Christ was what Socratic irony was pointing at.

In accordance with this Christocentric point of view Kierkegaard maintains that Socrates was the actual pinnacle of irony. He writes that Socrates arrived at the idea of the good, the beautiful, the true as the boundary, came up to ideal infinity as possibility. But now, after these ideas “have acquired their actuality and personality its absolute pleroma [fullness],” irony manifests itself in a more precarious form. Such a precarious form was the irony of the Romantics, of Schlegel, Tieck, and Solger, who in the middle of Christian Europe attempted to reinstate irony as a position. The first manifestation of irony was spontaneous and still lacked full self-consciousness; the Socratic irony was in a certain sense innocent. Moreover, it was to a certain extent justified in as much as in the Socratic irony subjectivity asserted its right for the first time in world history. The second manifestation of irony, Romantic irony, was more precarious while it meant a conscious appropriation of a pagan standpoint in the middle of Christendom.

Kierkegaard sees Romantic irony as having developed out of the philosophy of Fichte. Modern speculative thought had already

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126 CI, 14–15 n / SVI XIII, 110–111 n.
129 CI, 196–197 / SVI XIII, 278.
taken a wrong turn in Kant, when it had liberated itself from
dogmatics, begun to reflect reflection, and thereby detached itself
from concrete actuality. Fichte went one step further on this road
of abstraction by infinitizing the I so that it became constitutive of
the world. The Romantic ironist, in his turn, identified his em-
pirical and temporal self with this all-encompassing and all-
surpassing I, and this was the idea that loomed behind his ironic
activity. Romantic irony, thus, differed essentially from the
irony of Socrates. Socrates had not negated actuality in general; he
had negated only the given actuality at a particular time (the sub-
stantial actuality as it had been in Greece), and his irony had de-
manded another actuality, that of subjectivity, of ideality. By
contrast, in Romantic irony it was not an element of the given
actuality that was to be negated and superseded by a new element.
This subject-centered, Fichtean, potentiated form of irony at-
ttempted to negate all given actuality in order to create room for a
self-created actuality.

The characterization and critique of Romanticism in The Con-
cept of Irony appears to be based directly on Hegel’s remarks about
irony in the introduction to his Aesthetics. Like Hegel, Kierke-
gaard locates the roots of Romantic irony in Fichte’s philosophy of
reflection. He also agrees with Hegel that the Romantics used
irony for the purpose of leading an artistic life. According to
Hegel, the Romantic ironists tried to live as artists and form their

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130 CI, 272–276 / SVI XIII, 344–348.
131 CI, 271 / SVI XIII, 343.
132 CI, 275 / SVI XIII, 347.
133 Aesthetics I, 64–69 / Jub. 12, 100–106. For a short synopsis on the proximity
of these texts, see Walsh (1994), 55–56. For a thoughtful analysis of the simi-
larities and differences in the reception of Romantic irony by Hegel and
Kierkegaard, see Perkins (1970). The influence of Hegel is registered in a com-
prehensive way in Stewart (2003), 170–177.
lives *artistically* (*Kunstlerisch*);\(^{134}\) according to Kierkegaard, the great requirement of irony was that man should *live poetically* (*leve poetisk*).\(^{135}\) But as we shall see, in some respects Kierkegaard comes to take sides with the Romantics against Hegel.

### 1.2 Living Poetically and Mastered Irony

As the positive ideal of the Romantic ironists Kierkegaard identifies the ideal of living poetically. At the end of the 1700s and in the early 1800s these authors and theorists had reacted against a spiritless way of life that had somehow come into being in Christian Europe. In 1841 Kierkegaard attempts to revive and revise their thoughts and feelings:

> [T]ieck and the whole romantic school stepped into or thought they were stepping into an age in which people seemed to be totally fossilized in finite social forms. Everything was completed and consummated in a divine Chinese optimism that let no reasonable longing go unsatisfied, no reasonable desire go unfulfilled. The glorious principles and maxims of habit and custom were the objects of a pious idolatry; everything was absolute, even the absolute. One abstained from polygamy; one wore a stovepipe hat. Everything had its importance. In accordance with his station, everyone felt with nuanced dignity how much he was accomplishing, how great was the importance of his indefatigable efforts to himself and to the whole... Everything proceeded calmly with measured step, even the person on his way to propose marriage, because he knew, of course, that he was on a licit mission and was taking a very earnest step. Everything occurred according to the stroke of the hour. One reveled in nature on St. John’s Eve, one was contrite on the fourth Friday after Easter; one fell in love when one turned twenty, went to bed at ten o’clock. One married, one lived for domesticity and one’s position in society; one


\(^{135}\) *CI*, 280 / *SV* XIII, 351.
acquired children, acquired family worries. One stood in the full vigor of manhood, started to be noticed in high places for one’s benevolent activities, was an associate of the clergyman, under whose eyes one epically developed the many beautiful traits necessary for an honorable posthumous reputation, which one knew the pastor some day would seek in vain to stammer out with deep emotion. One was a friend in the true sense of the word, a real friend, just as one was a real government officeholder. One knew something about the world and brought up children in the same understanding; one was inspired one evening a week by the poet’s praises of the beauty of existence; one was also everything to one’s own family, year in and year out with an on-the-dot certainty and precision.\(^{136}\)

As a reaction to such a philistine way of life Romanticism was understandable and, to a certain extent, justifiable. Even the licentious novel *Lucinde* (1799) by Friedrich Schlegel becomes understandable, if considered with reference to “the many degradations that have crept into a multitude of life’s relationships and have been especially indefatigable in making love as tame, as housebroken, as sluggish, as dull, as useful and usable as any other domestic animal.”\(^{137}\) What should be the ground for the human relationships—the passion of love—threatens to become subordinated to petty-minded social purposes:

> There is a very narrow earnestness, an expediency [*Hensigtsmæssighed*], a miserable teleology, which many people worship as an idol that demands infinite endeavor as its legitimate sacrifice. Thus *in and for itself* love is nothing but becomes something only through the intention whereby it is integrated with the pettiness that creates such a furor in the private theatres of families.\(^{138}\)

\(^{136}\) *CI*, 303–304 / *SV* XIII, 371–372. (Italics of the original Danish have been added.)

\(^{137}\) *CI*, 286 / *SV* XIII, 357.

\(^{138}\) *CI*, 287 / *SV* XIII, 358. (Italics of the original Danish have been added.)
Love is used for finite purposes, apparently such as appearing in
society with a pure and charming fiancée and, later, with a warm-
hearted and prudent wife. It is tamed by intentions, apparently
such as getting a respectful husband who never gets into and never
gives any unnecessary trouble with his unrealistic ideals but, in-
stead, takes care of his status, steady income, and children. Spon-
taneous love, the original phenomenon of human nature, becomes
thereby one resource among others to be made use of in order to
prosper in society. At the same time the personal dimension gets
driven out of human relationships. Schlegel complains in *Lucinde*
that the man loves in the woman “only the species,” the woman in
the man “only the degree of man’s natural gifts and his social posi-
tion,” and both love in their children “only for being their own
bungling creatures and their property.”

No wonder, then, that
the Romantics longed for the pagan Greece, longed for “those days
when human beings lived so happily without sorrows and cares,
when everything was so human, when the gods themselves set the
tone and sometimes laid down their heavenly dignity in order
fraudulently to gain the love of a mortal woman…when everything
lived for love alone and for the happy lovers everything in turn was
but a myth about love.”

In opposition to petty-minded philistine expediency, then, the
Romantic movement required that life should be poetical, and
attempted to change life into poetry. Poetry, which here means art
and artistic activity in general, has a capacity to open up a higher
actuality and to expand and transfigure the imperfect into the
perfect. This way poetry assuages the pain that life’s imperfections
cause and reconciles the subject with life at least temporarily.

The Romantics imagined that by assuming irony as a total phi-
losophical standpoint they could change life permanently into a

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140 CI, 288 / SV I XIII, 359.
141 CI, 297 / SV I XIII, 366.
work of art and enjoy it. They used irony to negate the imperfect, historically given actuality so that they could set in its place their own, artistically created actuality.\textsuperscript{142}

Liberating himself from the concerns of actuality by taking a playful artistic stance in relation to it, the Romantic ironist distanced himself from the wretchedness of the given actuality.\textsuperscript{143} In order to hold onto the poetical, he escaped into a self-created world. Through irony he negated the validity of historical actuality and lived then in a hypothetical way. In the form of possibility he ran through a multitude of destinies and assumed different roles and points of view: he was a nobleman, then a beggar, then a proud patrician, then a penitent pilgrim. But finally, in accordance with the spirit of irony, the masquerade ended up in nothing and the Romantic became a victim of his own irony. A Romantic ironist despised the commonplace people; he lived enclosed in his own high spheres and observed ironically the narrow-minded, animal-like creatures around him with whom he felt no kinship. But, ironically, in the end he came to resemble them. The commonsense people, as “miserable products of [their] environment,” have no authentic character, no \textit{an sich}, as Kierkegaard puts it, around which to build up their personalities. But neither had the ironist, who continually wanted to create himself and, therefore, could not accept his actual, given self, and, therefore, actually became nothing.\textsuperscript{144}

Thus, Kierkegaard is favorably disposed towards the ideal of living poetically but he thinks that the Romantics did not in truth overcome the philistine spiritlessness, against which they reacted. For him the Romantic movement appears as an unsuccessful attempt to change life into poetry. The Romantics did not find a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{142} \textit{CI}, 275 / \textit{SVI} XIII, 347.
  \item \textsuperscript{143} \textit{CI}, 279–280 / \textit{SVI} XIII, 351.
  \item \textsuperscript{144} \textit{CI}, 280–283 / \textit{SVI} XIII, 352–354.
\end{itemize}
way out, but a wrong way—they did not seize upon actuality, but fell asleep and started to dream.\textsuperscript{146}

For the Romantic ironist the context in which he existed had no validity, therefore it was not his concern to form himself in such a way that he would fit into his environment. Instead, the environment had to be formed to fit him, and to achieve this he composed poetically not only himself but also his environment. Moreover, it became of importance for him to suspend what is constitutive in actuality, that which orders and supports it, morality and forms of ethical life (Moral og Sædelighed).\textsuperscript{146} But this suspension did not result in a poetic existence such as, for example, that in ancient Greece. A Greek person lived poetically and composed his personality into a work of art. But this he did not accomplish by means of total irony and by force of the sovereignty of his subjective spirit. On the contrary, he recognized that he had been given a task. According to Kierkegaard, it was very urgent for a Greek to become conscious of what was original in him, and this originality was the boundary within which he was free to compose himself. Thus, he had an objective that was his absolute objective, and, whereas it was of importance for the Romantic ironist to have nothing \textit{an sich} (in itself) so that he could create himself poetically, for the Greek there was something \textit{an sich} around which he composed his life.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{CI}, 286–287 and 304 / \textit{SV} XIII, 357–358 and 372–373.
\textsuperscript{146} \textit{CI}, 283 / \textit{SV} XIII, 354.
\textsuperscript{147} \textit{CI}, 281 and 288–289 / \textit{SV} XIII, 352 and 359–360. Here Kierkegaard is probably again accompanying Hegel who in his \textit{Lectures on the History of Philosophy} talks about \textquotedblleft those great plastic natures consistent through and through...resembling a perfect classical works of art.\textquotedblright{} In these men, as in real works of art, some idea is brought forth, a character is presented in which every trait is determined by the idea. Of such men, in whom all sides of individuality were carried out in accordance with the one inward principle, Hegel names Sophocles, Thucydides, Socrates, and, as the most perfect representative, Pericles. The last mentioned lived with the sole end of being a statesman so that,
Kierkegaard claims that because he lacked respect for what has validity in itself, the Romantic ironist failed to reach the ideal of living poetically. The suspension of morality and ethical forms of life did not open a poetic existence for the Romantic ironist. Instead, the result was tedious emptiness. As the ironist lived in a totally hypothetical, subjunctive way, his life lost all continuity. What was left was an arbitrary succession of most contrasting moods (**Stemninger**); his life became nothing but moods. This dissonant succession of moods did not have a high aesthetic value but was characterized by boredom, instead. Ironically, boredom became the only continuity the ironist had.\(^\text{148}\) Thus the attempt of the Romantics to change life into poetry resulted in the loss of that which is genuinely poetic in life.\(^\text{149}\)

For Kierkegaard the moral of the story is the irreplaceability of ethically and religiously qualified historical actuality. According to Kierkegaard, historical actuality "stands in a twofold relation to the subject, partly as a gift that refuses to be rejected, partly as a task that wants to be fulfilled."\(^\text{150}\) With their total criticism, the Romantics rejected actuality as a gift. There might have been much in actuality that needed criticism and chastisement, much in existence that had to be cut away precisely because it was not actuality. But to aim criticism at the whole of actuality was a mistake. By rejecting all actuality, irony annihilated the relation of the individual to his past. For irony there was no actual past, only the imagined past of legends and fairytales, the past of the beautiful Greece and the romantic Middle Ages. The actual history "in which the authentic individual has his positive freedom because

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\(^{149}\) CI, 289 / SVI XIII, 359–360.

\(^{150}\) CI, 276 / SVI XIII, 348. (Italics have been added.)
in his premises” was set aside. By cutting itself off from what is given and by going beyond all given actuality, irony also made itself incapable of fulfilling actuality as a task. By suspending the historical actuality, irony itself became suspended. For irony all actuality turned into possibility and there was no longer any actual context within which one could fulfill one’s purpose in earnest. Here Kierkegaard restates the view he had brought forward in connection with Socrates: “[I]n order for an acting individual to be able to accomplish his task by fulfilling actuality, he must feel himself integrated in a larger context, must feel the earnestness of responsibility, must feel and respect every reasonable consequence.” Irony was free from this, free from the sorrows of actuality, but also free from its joys and blessing.

These considerations give new content to the ideal of living poetically. The Romantics had admired and longed for the spontaneous, poetic life of ancient Greece. But their example shows that in fact there is no returning to the poetic existence of the ancient Greeks. Romantic irony, as a modern, highly reflective attempt to compose oneself poetically (at digte sig selv), is unable to bring back the vanished age in its innocence. Actuality has changed. In historical actuality something has intervened—man has come to understand himself and his end on the basis of a spiritual religion, that is, on the basis of Christianity. The ideas of the good, the beautiful, and the true now “have acquired their actuality and personality its absolute pleroma [fullness]” in Christ, and therefore it is no longer justifiable to isolate oneself ironically from the historical actuality in the name of these ideas. The irony of Socrates was in a sense justifiable, since he

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152 CI, 279 / SVI XIII, 351.
155 CI, 196–197 / SVI XIII, 278.
really was ignorant of the truth. He broke with the historical actuality of his time in full innocence and the position of infinite, absolute negativity was his world historical destiny. But now irony is no more justifiable as a total position and nostalgia for ancient Greece is misplaced: the historical actuality has changed for good.\textsuperscript{156}

Kierkegaard does not have anything against resigning himself to this actuality and he brings forth his own ideal of living poetically: instead of trying to compose oneself poetically, one should \textit{let oneself be composed poetically (at lade sig digte)}. Here the individual takes it as his task to become for himself (\textit{für sich}) what he is in himself (\textit{an sich}), that is, he tries to become conscious of what is original in himself and to mould himself in accordance with it. To be precise, Kierkegaard appears to sketch two possible variants of living poetically. He writes that \textit{any sensible person}, “who has any respect for a human being’s worth” and sense for the originality in a human being, may “come to the aid of the divine in man.” He may listen mutely and quietly to “the voice of what is distinctive in individuality,” detect its movements and help it to become available in the individual so that “the whole individuality will develop harmoniously into a pliable form rounded off in itself.” On the other hand, \textit{the pious Christian} “knows himself as that person who has reality for God” (\textit{den Christne veed sig som den, der har Realitet for Gud}) and is aware of his life “as upbringing, education,” which develops the seeds God himself has placed in him. In these cases the individual has a given absolute objective that he strives to fulfill: he takes it as his task to become for himself (\textit{für sich}) what he is in himself (\textit{an sich}), that is, he tries to become conscious of what is true and original in himself and to mould himself in accordance with it.\textsuperscript{157} This absolute objective, i.e. “to let oneself be composed

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{CI}, 288–289 / \textit{SV} \textsc{Xiii}, 359–360.
\textsuperscript{157} \textit{CI}, 280–281 / \textit{SV} \textsc{Xiii}, 352.
poetically,” also implies that the individual should strive to find his place and purpose in the actuality in which he is situated. Kierkegaard writes that an individual who attempts to compose himself poetically, wants to compose his environment also, but an individual who lets himself be poetically composed has a definite given context into which he wants to fit. Thus, he does not become a word without meaning because it is wrenched out of its associations.158

In Kierkegaard’s view, the individual has to live religiously in order to live poetically in the actual world and as his actual self. Only the religious is able to reconcile the human spirit with the given actuality. To live poetically is to live infinitely, writes Kierkegaard, and it is only the religious that “infinitizes actuality for me.” He who lives religiously has infinity inside himself, and this inner infinity is the only true infinity, whereas the external infinity conjured up by the Romantic poet is just an illusion. In other words, while it is an illusion that the individual could attain the infinite in the actual life with the help of irony and his own artistic creativity, with the help of the divine the religious individual may attain it. The enjoyment sought by Schlegel and the other Romantics was nothing but a dream, since it was based on emigration from the actual world and from one’s actual self. Moreover, it was a dream reserved only for some exceptional individuals, since all the ordinary people were excluded from it. The religious individual, on the other hand, enjoys himself in truth and, according to Kierkegaard, any human being can live poetically who wants to do so in truth (i Sandbeden). As an example of such an inward enjoyment Kierkegaard mentions the renunciation of revenge and inward mastering of anger that is possible for the simplest human being. The enjoyment from a vengeance, from an external victory over an enemy, is ephemeral like a dream; but the enjoyment one

158 CI, 283 / SVI XIII, 354.
receives from overcoming oneself, and thereby the world, is infinite and eternal. The Romantic misses this highest enjoyment, the true bliss, in which “the subject is not dreaming, but possesses himself in infinite clarity, is absolutely transparent to himself” in his “absolute and eternal validity.”

In his *Aesthetics*, Hegel had criticized the Romantic way of “living artistically.” According to Hegel, the Romantic ironist considers his own artistically living ego as the absolute ego, the constitutional activity of which Fichte had described. This ego is the lord and master of everything, since everything in the world is constituted by its judgments. Hegel writes:

> In no sphere of morals, law, things human and divine, profane and sacred, is there anything that would not first have to be laid down by the ego, and that therefore could not equally well be destroyed by it. Consequently everything genuinely and independently real becomes only a show, not true and genuine on its own account or through itself, but a mere appearance due to the ego in whose power and caprice and at whose free disposal it remains.

This ego is at the same time a living active individual that expresses himself, brings himself into appearance, and thereby realizes himself. Hegel explains that the Romantic ironist appropriates this Fichtean ego and identifies its activity with his own artistic activity. As a free artist, the ironist gives the world truth, meaning, and beauty at will just in order to negate it again the next moment. Hegel’s critique is that the life of such an artistic ego is arbitrary, superficial and irresponsible:

> I live as an artist when all my action and my expression in general, in connection with any content whatever, remains for me a mere show and assumes a shape which is wholly in my power. In that case I

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am not really in earnest either with this content or, generally, with its expression and actualization. For genuine earnestness enters only by means of substantial interest, something of intrinsic worth like truth, ethical life, etc... When the ego that sets up and dissolves everything out of its own caprice is the artist, to whom no content of consciousness appears absolute and independently real but only self-made and destructible show, such earnestness can find no place, since validity is ascribed only to the formalism of the ego.\textsuperscript{161}

In that he does not respect anything except for his own genius, the ironist is according to Hegel immoral and arrogant:

\[\text{T}\]his virtuosity of an ironical artistic life apprehends itself as a divine genius...[\text{H}e who has reached this standpoint of divine genius looks down from his high rank on all the other men, for they are pronounced dull and limited, inasmuch as law, morals, etc., still count for them as fixed, essential, and obligatory. So then the individual, who lives in this way as an artist, does give himself relations to others: he lives with friends, mistresses, etc.; but, by his being a genius, this relation to his own specific reality, his particular actions, as well as to what is absolute and universal, is at the same time null; his attitude to it all is ironical.

As a result, everything appears as null and vain for the subject, except his own subjectivity. But, unfortunately, this subjectivity itself becomes thereby hollow and empty, mere vanity (\textit{Eitelkeit}).\textsuperscript{162}

To a considerable extent Kierkegaard follows Hegel’s critique in his dissertation. As shown above, he, too, criticizes the ironist for the lack of earnestness and for bypassing morality and the ethical forms of life. Like Hegel, he points out the hubris and arrogance of the ironist, who deifies his own genius, and shows how the ironist ends into nothingness as he breaks the bonds with his

\textsuperscript{161} Hegel, \textit{Aesthetics} I, 65 / \textit{Jub.} 12, 101.
\textsuperscript{162} Hegel, \textit{Aesthetics} I, 66 / \textit{Jub.} 12, 102.
surroundings and with his fellow beings. However, Kierkegaard deviates from Hegel in that he cherishes the ideal of living poetically itself and just gives new ethical and religious content to it. With Romantic irony an ideal of living poetically is introduced, and Kierkegaard acknowledges this ideal as valid: he claims that man has just as great a claim upon the poetic as the moral has a claim upon him. To fulfill both these claims, Kierkegaard introduces a religious way of living poetically. He confirms that the task of the individual is indeed to live poetically, that is, to live infinitely, but he claims that that is possible only by living religiously. As Kierkegaard understands it a genuine religious individual lets himself be poetically composed by obeying and following the divine in his life and by letting the divine transform his self. In obedience to God the individual becomes his true self, and finds his purpose in the actuality in which God has positioned him.

In this ethical-religious life irony, too, has its role to play. Here Kierkegaard deviates from Hegel again. Indeed, his dissertation may be read as a corrective to Hegel and Hegelians in that he suggests a major role for mastered irony (bebersket Ironi) in the development of spirit. According to Kierkegaard, irony as a position and a way of life had been condemned by Hegel with some indignation. Kierkegaard notes that “Hegel always discusses irony in a very unsympathetic manner”; in Hegel’s eyes irony is anathema. When addressing the “prodigal sons of speculation,” i.e. the Romantic ironists, his voice is always “harsh and schoolmasterly.” Kierkegaard admits that Hegel had been justified in correcting the Romantic ironists, but claims that Hegel had missed the truth that lies in irony:

[T]he fact that Hegel became irritated with the form of irony closest to him naturally impaired his interpretation of the concept...Hegel has surely conferred a great benefit through the earnestness with

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163 CI, 297 / SVI XIII, 366.
which he takes a stand against any isolation, an earnestness that makes it possible to read much that he has written with much invigoration and considerable edification. But on the other hand, it must be said that by his one-sided attack on the post-Fichtean irony he has overlooked the truth of irony, and by his identifying all irony with this, he has done irony an injustice.\(^{164}\)

Maybe the Romantics had had wrong philosophical presuppositions and had gone too far in their irony, but there was something justified in it, something that would deserve a closer look not least from Hegelians themselves. This, it seems to me, Kierkegaard tries to bring out by returning to Socrates.

Kierkegaard’s point is that the founder of morality can be seen as and could have been an ironist.\(^{165}\) In other words, he tries to show that it is possible to see the paragon of personal morality as an ironist.\(^{166}\) Against the Hegelian way of thinking, there would be a point in showing this. It would serve to remind us that there is a difference between the inner and the outer, that appearance is sometimes delusive, and that to grasp the spirit behind the appearance is an interpretative act of a human spirit itself.\(^{167}\) It would serve to remind us that the ethical life of the single individual is essentially hidden from objective observers, just as all spiritual life is. Incidentally, it is this very same awareness that irony itself serves to awaken, and herein also lies the (relative) justification of irony:

\(^{164}\) CI, 265–266 / SV1 XIII, 338–339.

\(^{165}\) CI, 235 / SV1 XIII, 310.

\(^{166}\) Showing that Socrates was perhaps not an ethicist, but an ironist parallels the maneuver that Johannes de silentio carries out in Fear and Trembling (Frygt og Bæven, 1843), i.e. showing that Abraham was perhaps not a “knight of faith,” but a murderer (see FT, 54–67 / SV1 III, 104–116). This gives some support for the view that I try to develop here that in The Concept of Irony Kierkegaard was already working ironically against Hegelianism.

\(^{167}\) Cf. the “Preface” of Either/Or (EO1, 3–4 / SV1 I, v–vi).
irony rescues the soul from the snares of relativity, from having its life blindly in finitude. As noticed above, according to Kierkegaard the quality that permeates all irony is that “the phenomenon is not the essence but the opposite of essence.” For example, in speech “the thought, the meaning is the essence, and the word is the phenomenon.” In truthful speech and thinking both elements are absolutely necessary for, as Plato had already noticed, all thinking is speaking. Truth demands the identity of these two elements, that is, it demands the identity of essence and phenomenon. In historical actuality, however, truth is never there completely, and this state of affairs makes up ground for irony. The Hegelian retort would be that the essence, the idea, is all the same becoming apparent in historical actuality: “[T]he idea’s becoming concrete is precisely the historical actuality” and “in this historical actuality every single link has its validity as an element.” However, Kierkegaard maintains that given the Hegelian view of world history, it is necessary that now and then an ironist must appear in historical actuality. According to this view, the dialectical unfolding of the idea goes through contradictions and in world history the contradictions become concrete.

Now, even if the idea is in itself one and universal, it cannot appear as such in finitude, in historical actuality: for different generations separated by time and space the given actuality, i.e. the historically actualized idea, is bound to be different. As the moment of the idea becomes concrete, and this can take place only through particular generations and individuals, the actuality valid for the preceding generation and for the individuals in that gen-

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168 CI, 77 / SVI XIII, 170.
169 CI, 326 / SVI XIII, 390.
170 An allusion probably to the Sophist, 263 e.
171 CI, 247 / SVI XIII, 322.
172 CI, 279 / SVI XIII, 351.
eration must be displaced by another. Here there appears to be a real contradiction and someone must dedicate himself to disqualifying what the others hold in value and honor, so that the new moment of world spirit may emerge. Someone must negate the old, someone such as Socrates or Erasmus of Rotterdam, that is, the ironist. To a certain degree, reasons Kierkegaard, every world-historical turning point must have this formation. He claims that, unlike in the system, in the historical actuality the negative exists, and to the negative in the Hegelian system corresponds irony in the historical actuality. Thus irony is a justified moment in the development of world history; irony has world-historical validity. But Kierkegaard goes even further, and claims that irony has a role to play also in his own time and in the life of every developing individual.

The heyday of Romantic irony had been in the beginning of the 1800s. In 1841 Kierkegaard already sees the phenomenon as passé—it has met its master in Hegel and the enthusiasm for public action and the idea of community (Menigheden) has blown it away. According to Kierkegaard, his own age is not exceedingly receptive to irony. An ironist may smile his ironic smile as much as he pleases, nobody will notice. The age demands something more:

\[\text{It demands, if not lofty pathos then at least loud pathos, if not speculation then at least conclusions, if not truth then at least persuasion, if not integrity then at least protestations of integrity, if not feeling then at least verbosity about feelings...It will not allow the mouth to be defiantly compressed or the upper lip to quiver mischievously; it demands that the mouth be open...It does not permit one to stand still and concentrate; to walk slowly is already suspicious...in}\]

\[173 \text{ CI, 259–262 / SV1 XIII, 333–335.}\]

\[174 \text{ CI, 242 / SV1 XIII, 318.}\]
Chapter 1: The Concept of Irony

this stirring period in which we live...It hates isolation...this age that hand in hand and arm in arm...lives for the idea of community.\textsuperscript{175}

However, in defiance of his age Kierkegaard is still able to discern a humble role which irony could play, a use in which it could be put. He advocates “mastered irony" (\textit{behersket Ironi}),\textsuperscript{176} which he takes to belong to a genuinely human life, and he claims that it is in this form that irony manifests itself in its proper meaning and true validity.\textsuperscript{177}

There is a discrepancy between essence and phenomena, ideal and actual. The Romantic ironist was conscious of this, and made use of it in liberating himself from the whole of actuality into the infinite possibilities of free poetic self-creation that was restricted only by his own genius. The movement in which irony is used when it is mastered is the opposite: it places the appropriate emphasis on actuality and teaches how to actualize actuality.\textsuperscript{178}

Kierkegaard begins his exposition of mastered irony from poetry. He considers how great poets, such as Shakespeare, have been able to compose their dramas. Unlike in the plays by Tieck, in Shakespeare the different spirits are directed and controlled so that, though free and fierce, they find their place in the microcosm of the poetic work. The drama develops freely and even if the atmosphere borders from time to time upon madness the poem never dissolves into subjective arbitrariness; in the end it is the objective that dominates. Kierkegaard’s explanation for these features of Shakespeare’s works is that in Shakespeare irony was omnipresent, but mastered. Now, according to Kierkegaard, the task of the poet as a human being is to also be a master over irony in his

\textsuperscript{175} CI, 246–247 / SVI XIII, 321–322.
\textsuperscript{176} CI, 324–329 / SVI XIII, 388–393. Howard and Edna Hong have translated \textit{behersket Ironi} as “controlled irony,” but “mastered irony” preserves better the (possible) allusion to the Hegelian dialectic.
\textsuperscript{177} CI, 326 / SVI XIII, 390.
\textsuperscript{178} CI, 326 and 328 / SVI XIII, 390 and 392.
individual existence and in the actuality to which he belongs himself. With mastered irony he should control the movements of his spirit and bring his poetic works into a conscious and inward relation to himself. Then he will not become spellbound by them, but will see them as moments in his own development. Thereby his life has “the inner infinity that is an absolute condition for living poetically.”

Let me try to explicate the role irony comes to play here. I, the drama writer, see in my imagination the characters I have created. I am conscious of their unique personalities. I imagine that in those characters dwells a spirit like mine, conscious (at least potentially) of the universal and infinite that transcends the finite, and with care I try to weave such a spirit into those particular characters restricted by their limited points of view in finitude. I then let these personalities express their spirit with few characteristic lines and collide with each other in the action of drama. Here, irony, the consciousness of the discrepancy between the essence and phenomenon, is mastered, and used as a tool for producing life-like, living characters and for bringing them into the unified action of the play. The next step is to understand that in my own existence a spirit conscious of the universal and infinite is woven into finitude and restricted in a similar way to a limited situation and a limited point of view. This makes me careful not to try to portray something that goes completely beyond my scope, but it also allows me to present my view freely to other people, not as the final, absolute truth about life, but as its moment, as my point of view at the time. I now come to understand my poem as a self-expression, as a line in dialogue, as a deed, which I am able to evaluate and control sub specie ironiae from above. I also come to understand that what I understand of these particular personali-

180 CI, 324 / SVI XIII, 388.
ties and their lives is determined by me being another such personality existing in a particular time and place.

As I change and become more experienced and, hopefully, wiser, a new viewpoint, a deeper and more comprehensive one, will open up. Thanks to mastered irony I will not get stuck with the greatness or poorness of my poem, but will see it as a documentation of a certain phase in my life, certain stage in my development. In other words, I become conscious of my works as being just moments in my own development. This is how mastered irony helps a poet to live poetically, to play his role in the drama of actual life. It brings the poet back to actuality, helps him to become oriented and integrated in the age in which he lives; it helps him to become positively free in the actuality to which he belongs.

Kierkegaard’s next move is to generalize the case of the poet: it is possible for anyone to live poetically in this way. Granted, it is not possible for everyone to compose great poems, but any human being is able to understand the difference between infinite and finite, essence and phenomenon, spirit and its manifestation. Everyone may also reach the insight that the way he experiences life is qualified by his own developing personality, by his being and striving. And just as irony can help the poet to detach himself from his enthusiastic activity, to become conscious of it as his activity, and to assume an observing attitude towards its finite manifestations, so it can help anyone else. Thus, irony may help any person, just as it helps the poet, to come into a conscious relationship to his own actuality. But in order to perform this task irony must be curtailed, mastered. How is this curtailment then brought about; what is it that comes to master irony?

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When going through Solger’s conception of irony, Kierkegaard comes across one view he judges as correct, namely, the view that irony and enthusiasm (Begeistring) are the two factors necessary for artistic production, the two necessary conditions for the artist. In connection with mastered irony he writes about “the conscious striving” that assigns to every particular line its place in the whole in the plays by Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791–1860), and states that the poet has to have “a totality-view of the world” which makes him a master of irony in his individual life. It appears to be this striving that persistently holds on to a “totality-view” that controls irony both in poetic composition and in actual life. The need for such a totality-view is pointed out earlier in the dissertation. In connection with Socrates, Kierkegaard wrote: “[T]rue earnestness is possible only in a totality in which the subject...feels the task to be something that he has not assigned to himself but that has been assigned to him.” To interpret, Kierkegaard is suggesting that irony should be balanced by the conscious striving after a meaningful whole. When mastered by such striving, the phenomena, the immediate meaning of which irony had negated, receive meaning again. Indeed, they come to manifest what is essential so that the essence and phenomena become one.

It appears that in actual life the striving that masters irony is ethical. The ethical character of mastered irony is suggested in the 11th thesis of Kierkegaard’s dissertation, which says that “the more

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184 CI, 319 / SVI XIII, 385.
185 CI, 325 / SVI XIII, 389.
186 CI, 235 / SVI XIII, 311. See also CI, 229 n / SVI XIII, 307 n, where Kierkegaard claims that the virtues of Socrates were not in fact “moral,” since they lacked “the deep earnestness that every virtue acquires only when it is ordered in a totality.” Here Kierkegaard is thinking of the state as such a totality to which the individual belongs.
187 CI, 325 / SVI XIII, 389.
recent irony belongs essentially under ethics.\textsuperscript{188} The thesis is in harmony with the theory of stages, in which irony figures as the intermediary stage between aesthetic and ethical existence.\textsuperscript{189} That Kierkegaard in 1841 already saw irony as border territory between the aesthetic and the ethical, just as Johannes Climacus did about five years later, is confirmed by an entry which he made in his \textit{Journals and Papers} while working on his dissertation. The entry states that, understood in the light of its concept, irony becomes a moment in what the Greeks understood by \textit{sôfrosynê} (soundness of mind, sobriety, self-control that controls desires and produces harmony, for example in Plato’s \textit{Republic}, 430 d—).\textsuperscript{190} In other words, irony becomes a constituent of the ethical character.

Mastered by the ethical, irony becomes “a serving spirit” in the life of the human individual.\textsuperscript{191} As a moment in ethical striving it receives its proper meaning, its true validity. When the individual “has the proper stance” (\textit{er rigtig stilet}), irony makes a movement opposite to that in which uncontrolled irony manifested itself—now “it limits, finitizes, and circumscribes and thereby yields truth, actuality, content; it disciplines and punishes and thereby yields balance and consistency.” Mastered irony “rescues the soul from having its life in finitude even though it is living energetically and robustly in it.”\textsuperscript{192} In other words, irony reminds us that “essence must manifest itself as phenomenon,” but at the same time “prevents all idol worshipping of the phenomenon.”\textsuperscript{193} Irony reminds man of his predicament between the infinite and finite, the eternal and temporal. And if human beings are determined to live in finitude and temporality with the consciousness of the infinite

\textsuperscript{188} \textit{CI}, 6 / \textit{SV} I XIII, 11.
\textsuperscript{190} \textit{JP} 2, 1728 / \textit{Pap} III B 10. (Translation slightly altered.)
\textsuperscript{191} Cf. \textit{CI}, 325 / \textit{SV} I XIII, 389.
\textsuperscript{192} \textit{CI}, 326 / \textit{SV} I XIII, 390.
\textsuperscript{193} \textit{CI}, 329 / \textit{SV} I XIII, 392.
and eternal, and if their task is to bring these two spheres together in their lives, then "no genuinely human life is possible without irony," and irony becomes "the absolute beginning of personal life."¹⁹⁴

With all due respect to Hegel, then, even in the modern world irony is still needed, not only in the sphere of poetry, but also in those of science and politics. Kierkegaard writes:

Particularly in our age, irony must be commended. In our age, scientific scholarship has come into possession of such prodigious achievements that there must be something wrong somewhere; knowledge not only about the secrets of the human race but even about the secrets of God is offered for sale at such a bargain price today that it all looks very dubious. In our joy over the achievement in our age, we have forgotten that an achievement is worthless if it is not made one's own.¹⁹⁵

Even if scientific scholarship has come into possession of the final and definitive truth about the eternal, the divine that lies at the ground of all being, men will still have the task of appropriating this truth personally and translating it into their personal lives. Kierkegaard clearly has in his mind the Hegelian science here, since he writes: "For example, when scientific scholarship teaches that actuality has absolute validity, then the point is truly to acquire that validity... When scientific scholarship mediates all the opposites, then the point is that this full-bodied actuality ought truly to become visible."¹⁹⁶

Granted that the philosophy of Hegel establishes that actuality has absolute validity, there is still the task truly to bring one's life into harmony with the absolute so that the full-bodied actuality will also become visible in one's personal life. In fulfilling this task, irony may serve as a guide that guides pre-

¹⁹⁴ Cf. CI, 326 / SV I XIII, 390.
¹⁹⁵ CI, 327 / SV I XIII, 391.
¹⁹⁶ CI, 328 / SV I XIII, 391.
cisely by taking away from men the illusion of possessing the essential. Irony will keep the task open by “balancing the accounts,” by pointing out how the scientific knowledge may actually go hand in hand with ignorance in personal life.

The third sphere of human activity where Kierkegaard would welcome mastered irony seems to be that of politics and political journalism. He writes: “In another direction there is in our day a prodigious enthusiasm, and, strangely enough, that which makes it enthusiastic seems to be prodigiously little. How beneficial irony can be here. There is an impatience that wants to harvest before it sows—just let irony discipline it.”

Here there seems to be a recollection of the debate against the liberal press that Kierkegaard waged in 1835–1836. In a speech “Our Journal Literature: A Study of Nature in the Midday Light” (Vor Journal-Literatur. Studium efter Naturen i Middagsbelysning) that he delivered on November 28, 1835, at the University Student Union, Kierkegaard had characterized the activity of the newspaper Kjøbenhavnsposten (Copenhagen’s Post) as “bustling business” (Stundeløshed). Whereas authentic action (den sande Handlen) goes hand in hand with calm circumspection, this liberal newspaper acts quite haphazardly in that it tries to import new forms of political life straightaway from abroad. But “here, where the subject is a new development, here one should take heed and diligently pay attention to the compass. And although development and progress in other nations can help us considerably and teach us many precautionary measures, one should remember that it does not do to travel in Sjælland with a map of France,” writes Kierkegaard.

In other words, in its own action Kjøbenhavnspos-

\[197\] CI, 327–328 / SV I XIII, 391.

\[198\] CI, 328 / SV I XIII, 391.


\[200\] EPW, 47–48 / Pap. 1 B 2, p. 173.
ten neither holds to the motionless North Pole, i.e. to the eternal idea, nor has sufficient regard to the singularity of the given Danish actuality, while it tries to import political forms from abroad. According to Kierkegaard, the manner in which Kjøbenhavnsposten advocates new political forms manifests a general tendency of the whole age. As Kierkegaard sees it, the whole age—its social relations, aesthetics, philosophy, politics—is imbued with a "formal striving." Although Kierkegaard agrees with the effort to cling to form "insofar as it continues to be the medium through which we have the idea," he reminds us that "it is the idea that is supposed to determine the form, not the form that is supposed to determine the idea." Form is nothing but the "coming into existence of the idea in the world." One should also keep in mind that "life is not something abstract but something extremely individual," and that "life is not acquired through form, but form is acquired through life."201

In Kjøbenhavnsposten no. 43, 1836, the leading young liberalist Orla Lehmann replied to Kierkegaard: “It is impossible...that anyone can look upon the seriousness and honesty with which everything now is striving forward without looking with joy and gladness into the future that one day will harvest what the present sows.”202 (Note that here we have the metaphor of harvesting that appears in the passage of The Concept of Irony quoted above!) Kierkegaard published his rejoinder in Heiberg’s conservative Københavns flyvende Post (Copenhagen’s Flying Post). In his reply “The Morning Observations in Kjøbenhavnsposten no. 43” (Kjøbenhavnspostens Morgenbetrætninger i Nr. 43), Kierkegaard ironically characterized Lehmann’s article as “Act Three: Great fantasia for the journalistic mouth organ [Mundharpe] on the given theme: a ‘glance into the future that one day will harvest what

201 EPW, 46–47 / Pap. 1 B 2, p. 172.
202 EPW, 138 / Petersen 1977, 63–64.
Chapter 1: The Concept of Irony

Kjøbenhavnsposten sows.²⁰³ (Here we have the disciplining irony recommended in that same passage.) The point seems to be that the liberalist enthusiasm for freedom of the press and democratic constitution is based on pure fantasy—if the actors of the political drama are not inwardly reformed and do not themselves act in accordance with their ideals, there is nothing good to be expected from the reformation of external forms.

Later, in his first book From the Papers of One Still Living (Af en endnu Levendes Papirer, 1838), Kierkegaard again criticized “the newer development” which disparages the past and fancies to inaugurate a new, positive era.²⁰⁴ In the political sphere, this movement clings to “the cliché that the world always becomes wiser.” Kierkegaard’s own view of historical evolution is less optimistic—he quotes Goethe: Vernunft wird Unsinn, Wohlthat Plage (Faust, Part I, line 1976)—and he is not looking forward to seeing the cleared plains without the slightest poetic shelter that the enlightened attack on the given actuality will leave behind itself.²⁰⁵ In The Concept of Irony Kierkegaard describes ironically his age that does not understand irony, “hates isolation,” and “hand in hand and arm in arm...lives for the idea of community.”²⁰⁶ In a footnote to this passage he states that he does not mean “to deprecate or deprecate the earnest efforts of the age,” but would wish “that the age were more earnest in its earnestness.”²⁰⁷ (Probably an ironical allusion to “the seriousness and honesty” of the contemporary striving that Orla Lehmann praised.)

On the basis of these texts, it becomes fairly clear what guidance Kierkegaard envisions the public life and politics of his age could derive from mastered irony. Mastered irony could call atten-

²⁰³ EPW, 11 / SVI XIII, 15.
²⁰⁴ EPW, 61 / SVI XIII, 53.
²⁰⁵ EPW, 63–64 / SVI XIII, 55–56.
²⁰⁶ The passage from CI, 246–247 / SVI XIII, 321–322 that was quoted above.
²⁰⁷ CI, 247 n / SVI XIII, 322 n.
tion from the stir of the public life back to the specific role each
single individual as a matter of fact plays in the given actuality.\footnote{The above-mentioned speech by Kierkegaard at the Student Union on November 28, 1835 exemplifies this kind of irony. In it the liberal press is being disciplined with the help of irony. In his speech Kierkegaard describes ironically how its real role in the historical development has been much more humble than its spokesmen boast.} This prevents one losing one’s soul to the public life, and teaches one to see its forms only as a framework for fulfilling the ideals that the individual is related to as an individual. To these ideals (for example, to the ideals of freedom and equality) each individual has a relationship primarily in his inwardness, and, therefore, the order of the reformation must be: first, the ethical and religious “transubstantiation of the given actuality” through an inward transformation of the individuals,\footnote{Cf. CI, 297 / SVI XIII, 366–367.} then, by all means, let us play mouth organs together.

Thus, according to Kierkegaard, irony should not be considered as a phenomenon of the past only: there is still a need for mastered irony in the different spheres of modern culture. Moreover, on a more personal level mastered irony belongs to the development of every human individual. Incorporated in the ethical striving that seeks to bring the actual into harmony with the ideal, irony enables personal life to gain health and truth. In this striving, actuality acquires its validity “as history in which consciousness successively matures” by “becoming more and more present in it.” Kierkegaard emphasizes that it is not contemplation which accomplishes this but action that, however, has to have an \textit{a priori in}

\footnote{If this is the correct interpretation of Kierkegaard’s thought, then he had already reached by 1841 the position with regard to politics that he explicated in the text “The Single Individual” that he wrote in the late 1840s and that was an appendix to \textit{The Point of View} in 1859. This text will be analyzed below in subdivision 8.2.}
itself in order to keep its aim.²¹¹ By “a priori” Kierkegaard probably
refers to the “totality-view” that the Socratic and Romantic irony
lacked: to a total view of life, that helps action to orientate itself in
life. In From the Papers of One Still Living Kierkegaard had namely
claimed that such a view, a “life-view”, is not derived from the fi-
nite and contingent experience only, but “is an unshakable cer-
tainty in oneself won from all experience...the transubstantiation
of experience” that gives the key for the progressive understanding
of “all possible particulars.” As examples Kierkegaard mentions
Stoicism that represents “a purely human standpoint” and the
conviction the apostle Paul expresses in Romans 8:38–39 “that
neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers,
nor the present, nor the future, nor height, nor depth, nor any
other creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in
Christ Jesus our Lord.”²¹²

1.3 Variants of Living Poetically

Let us now check what we have learnt from The Concept of Irony
about human situatedness in historical actuality and forms of liv-
ing poetically.

From Kierkegaard’s dissertation we get rough outlines of a
world-historical development. The first stage of this development
was the primitive form of poetic existence in ancient Greece de-
termined by the principle of “beautiful individuality.” Here the
spirit formed beautiful spiritual “works of art” out of concrete
materials. Events of nature and human life were interpreted freely
with the help of poetic imagination. Individuals were in immedi-
ate harmony with the concrete social units they belonged to and

²¹² EPW, 76–78 / SVI XIII, 68–69.
held their living traditions as sacred. Deities were thought to take part in all aspects of human life.

This stage of immediacy was shaken by the reflection of the Sophists, which brought out the contradictions that lay hidden within the Greek spirit, and destroyed by Socratic irony, which separated the phenomenal and essential from each other. In Socratic irony the divine was brought to bear on the practical life of the Greeks in the form of the unknown absolute; the infinite and the eternal revealed itself for the Greeks in the negative form of unknown possibility. At the same time Socratic irony signified the emergence of subjectivity and opened negative freedom for the individual subjects that were now liberated from the forms of substantial ethical life they had formerly been tied to. But, in that it destroyed the old substantial forms of ethical life, irony meant also the loss of responsibility and earnestness. The subject remained now in its abstractness as an empty form that lacked the eternal ideal Socratic irony had made him aware of.

The theories of Plato provided content to this empty human form and to the eternal world of ideals. As the ultimate goal of the development, however, and as a concrete phenomenon that fulfills it, Kierkegaard refers to Christ. In Christ the ideal becomes concrete: in him the fullness of deity resides and the ideals of goodness and truth receive their fulfillment. The relation of Christ to the world is absolutely real, so real that “the Church is conscious of itself as members of his body.” Here the subjects that irony had isolated and separated from each other find their way back home.

However, the story of humanity does not end in Christ once and for all—it repeats itself. When we come to the bourgeois society of modern Europe, life tends to fossilize again in finite forms as every infinite endeavor is suffocated by petty-minded calculation. Romantic irony reacted to this. It was an attempt to revive the

\[213\] CI, 220–221 n / SVI XIII, 300 n.
poetical dimension of life. With the help of irony the Romantics tried to break up the finite forms, in which commonsense people encapsulated life, so that there would be room for spontaneous passions again. In Kierkegaard’s view, however, the reckless play and wantonness of Romantic irony did not lead back to poetical life. On the contrary, through it the poetical possibilities that already resided in historical actuality were lost. For those possibilities to become rescued, irony ought to be mastered by infinite ethical-religious striving: one should not try to compose oneself poetically—one should try to let oneself be composed by God. Only by living religiously is one able to live infinitely, i.e. to live poetically. It seems that Kierkegaard already here also makes a distinction between the general religious and the Christian variant of letting oneself be composed poetically: any sensible person may “come to the aid of the divine in man,” but the pious Christian “knows himself as that person who has reality for God.”

In Kierkegaard’s dissertation, then, we may discern four variants of living poetically: the ancient Greek, the Romantic, the ethical-religious, and the Christian. What seems to be common to them all is the artistic use of imagination in giving meaning for, or in perceiving the meaning of, one’s life. In ancient times this art was practiced spontaneously, unreflectively; in modern times one must first break through commonsense reflection, and the way of life based on it, in order to live poetically. As the immediate variant is unattainable for us modern, reflecting people, let us concentrate on the modern variants of living poetically.

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214 CI, 280–281 / SVI XIII, 352. Admittedly the distinction, if it is made here at all, could not be made much more covertly. However, that Kierkegaard makes the distinction here receives some additional support from the fact that earlier, in From the Papers of One Still Living, he already draws a similar distinction between immanent (for example, Stoic) and transcendent (that is, Christian) life-views. (See EPW, 76–77 / SVI XIII, 68 referred to above.)
A characteristic that is common to these variants, and a pre-condition for them all, is the separation of the phenomenon and essence, the finite and infinite, the temporal and eternal from each other. These constituents of human existence differentiate from each other in and through the irony of Socrates. In the figure of ironic Socrates we have the paradigm of an existing individual that relates himself as a concrete individual to the absolute, the “in-itself.” The Romantic ironist has recourse to this paradigm in his attempt to live poetically. In this attempt the limiting, dead forms of given actuality are negated through irony and overcome through the creative activity of the Romantics. In the light of imagined possibilities, the finite actuality is shown to be just one amongst infinite possibilities. The realization of this makes room for the passion of love to emancipate from the restrictions of the given actuality. Liberated from preconceived purposes, under which it is subdued in bourgeois culture, passion is now able to enjoy absolute life and, guided by artistic maxims only, it is to produce new beautiful life to replace the old miserable one.

Kierkegaard’s argument against the Romantic mode of living poetically is based on the claim that the Romantic ironist is not at all as free as he imagines himself to be. The negative freedom achieved by the Romantic through irony is an illusion: in historical actuality one is always already related to oneself and others, to one’s social environment and to what is constitutive to it, morality and the forms of ethical life. Thus, the (apparently) anarchistic playfulness of the Romantics was also determined by history, that is, by the background and the purpose of the Romantics: the Romantics wanted to escape the spiritless form of life around them and to turn life into art on the model of the ancient Greek culture. Once Kierkegaard has determined the purpose of the Romantics, then, it is possible for him to maintain that the Romantics did not attain it: the result from Romantic irony was not a rebirth of the poetical life, but a boring succession of dissonant moods.
According to Kierkegaard, however, the ideal of living poetically itself is legitimate and there is something true also in irony. All individuals need irony, if they are to live a true life. So, in order to save the ironic subject and to direct him to the right road, Kierkegaard introduces the ethical-religious way of living poetically that contains irony as a moment. The religious transformation of actuality makes it possible for the individual to relate the finite and temporal to the infinite and eternal in his actual life. With the help of religious imagination, the given actuality is considered from the divine point of view. Within this totality-view, the life of the individual has ethical earnestness in that it is considered as a possibility to become brought up by God by fulfilling one’s task in the given historical actuality. Irony is mastered by the passionate ethical striving that situates the abstract subject back into its context. The obedient subject becomes open to the infinite that he finds within himself and, backed up with the infinite, appropriates the place assigned to him in finitude. Now there is continuity and constancy in his life. The change for the positive is exemplified by the passion of love that for the religious person gets an infinite character. With the help of this inexhaustible passion that the person finds within himself, he is able to overcome the finite obstacles. To enjoy this infinite passion within oneself is the highest enjoyment, an internal enjoyment of a different quality than the external enjoyment an aesthete may derive from his artistic activity.

The ethical-religious ideal of living poetically is thus posited against the aesthetic conception of the Romantic ironists. But, more generally, the ideal of living poetically is posited, first, against the calculating, philistine way of life ruled by social conventions, finite reflection, and worldly concerns. Against the prudent use of reason that allows the dignified stovepipe-hat man to stick to his position, Kierkegaard does indeed have a common cause with the Romantics. Second, the ideal of living poetically is posited against
the absent-minded way of life of men of culture, such as poets, philosophers, and newspapermen, who tend to lose themselves in abstractions such as art works, philosophical ideas, scientific theories, political ideologies and rhetoric. Here the problem is the abstract use of reason and imagination that neglects human situatedness and is insensitive to the concrete actuality of single individuals. In other words, as interpreted here, Kierkegaard’s thesis in 1841 was already that not only Socrates, Plato, Kant, and Fichte fell prey to the abstract use of reason, but so also did Hegelians and Hegel himself, who did not acknowledge the right of human beings to live poetically and did not see the justification of (mastered) irony.
In chapters 2, 4 and 6 we will examine whether “existence” and the different “existence-spheres” in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Afsluttende uvidenskabelige Efterskrift til de philosophiske Smuler, 1846) are compatible with “living poetically” and the different “forms of living poetically” in Kierkegaard’s other texts. If they are, then we may state that the existing subject is poetically situated in its context. In this chapter we shall investigate the spheres of immediate, commonsense, and ironic existence.

Johannes Climacus varies rather freely his theory of the existence-spheres as he develops it here and there in his unscientific

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215 Although *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* has been researched a lot, as far as I know there has been no attempt to spell out its view on the situational aspects of existence. Of the commentaries, Thulstrup 1984 concentrates on the historical background of *Postscript*. Johnson 1972 makes some interesting comparisons between how a scientific community exists and thinks and how a human individual exists and thinks. The comparisons suggest that the sense for the situatedness of individual existence tends to disappear in a modern scientific community, just as it disappears in the Hegelian speculation. Evans 1983 seems to be too analytical and sober to become involved in the complicated issue of human situatedness. Surprisingly enough, even Westphal 1996 almost bypasses the issue, although he has shown sensitivity to social and political aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought elsewhere (see Westphal 1987). Only in the last chapter of the book does he come to these issues, but finds nothing of interest in *Postscript* (see Westphal 1996, 194–195). In my view, these four commentaries show clearly enough that *Postscript* should be contextualized, i.e. read in the context of the other works by Kierkegaard surrounding it, so that the situational aspects of the existence would come to light. In the following exegesis that is my objective.
book. Discussing irony and humor, he writes: “There are three existence-spheres: the esthetic, the ethical, the religious. To these there is a respectively corresponding confinium [border territory]: irony is the confinium between the esthetic and the ethical; humor is the confinium between the ethical and the religious.”

But in a footnote some thirty pages later Climacus gives a more articulated scheme:

The spheres are related as follows: immediacy; finite common sense (endelig Forstandighed); irony; ethics with irony as its incognito; humor; religiousness with humor as its incognito—and then, finally, the essentially Christian, distinguished by the paradoxical accentuation of existence, by the paradox, by the break with immanence, and by the absurd.

Here Climacus divides the aesthetic sphere into two, but he does not always distinguish between immediate and commonsense existence. The reason for this is presumably that from a higher point of view the commonsense man also lives immediately in that he lacks the ethical-religious relationship to the eternal and infinite.

According to Climacus, people ordinarily exist in immediacy, i.e. in the sphere of immediate existence. By this he means that they are “unaware of the duplexity of thought-existence” and they have not “set [themselves] free by the duplexity.” In other words, they are not conscious that thought and existence are separated from each other in their existence and that they have the freedom to bring the two together in various ways. Consequently, they synthesize the two in a “natural,” immediate, instinctive way.

In his life the immediate person is guided by momentary inclinations and impulses, for example, the impulse to go to amuse
himself in Dyrehaven (the park north of Copenhagen). The immediate person does not much ponder if it is his duty or God’s will that he goes to have a good time.\textsuperscript{219} Neither does he stop to consider whether he is capable of doing that all by himself. He thinks that he is easily capable of enjoying himself in Dyrehaven and easily capable of going there, since he has the means to do it.\textsuperscript{220} Whereas a religious person understands that without God he is capable of nothing, “in immediacy, the wish is to be capable of everything, and immediacy’s faith, ideally, is in being capable of everything,” writes Kierkegaard.\textsuperscript{221}

An immediate person, who happens to be capable in what makes him happy, is “the happy [\textit{den lykkelige}, fortunate] unity of the finite and the infinite.”\textsuperscript{222} In other words, his happiness depends on the accidental circumstances of life, on the good fortune that he meets no serious obstacles on his way. As Climacus puts it, “The immediate person, viewed essentially, is fortunate.” This means that he is not constituted by the ethical-religious movements that aim at overcoming the contradictions between the finite and the infinite, the eternal and temporal. In his happy existence he does not even notice any serious contradictions. But if a contradiction meets him, it “comes from outside and is misfortune.”\textsuperscript{223} In other words, the immediate person does not appropriate the events of his life in his inwardness, so that the events would receive meaning as ethical-religious trials. If misfortune meets him, he is unable to see any meaning in it. Climacus writes:

When it does come, he feels the misfortune, but he does not comprehend [\textit{fatte}] the suffering. The immediate person never comes to an understanding with misfortune—that is, he does not become dialec-

\textsuperscript{219} \textit{CUP}, 495–496 / \textit{SV1 VII}, 430–431.
\textsuperscript{220} \textit{CUP}, 472 / \textit{SV1 VII}, 410.
\textsuperscript{221} \textit{CUP}, 461 / \textit{SV1 VII}, 401.
\textsuperscript{222} \textit{CUP}, 453 / \textit{SV1 VII}, 394.
\textsuperscript{223} \textit{CUP}, 433 / \textit{SV1 VII}, 376.
tical within himself. And if he does not escape from it, in the end it becomes evident that he lacks self-composure [Fatning]—that is, he despairs because he does not comprehend it...

Fortune, misfortune, fate, immediate enthusiasm, despair—these are what the esthetic life-view has at its disposal. Misfortune is an occurrence in relation to immediacy (fate).

If a fateful occurrence shakes his immediacy, the immediate person tries to escape it with the help of poetry. It is a task of the poet to lift “immediacy up into an ideality.” Instead of looking for an ethical-religious reconciliation, he seeks an aesthetic one: “For immediacy, poetry is the transfiguration of life.”

Climacus does not bring out the existence of ancient Greeks as an example of immediate existence, but what he here writes about happy immediacy and poetry echoes what Kierkegaard wrote about “happy Greece” and the principle of the “beautiful individuality” in *The Concept of Irony*. With the help of poetical imagination the Greeks immediately transfigured the events of life and, consequently, did not comprehend the contradictions between the ideal and actual. There are echoes of Magister Kierkegaard’s ideas also in what Climacus writes about pagan idolatry (*Afguderiet*). In his dissertation Kierkegaard wrote about the concrete gods and deities that took part in the everyday life of the Greeks before the era of Sophists and Socrates. In harmony

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226 *CUP*, 436 / *SV1* VII, 379.
227 *CI*, 204, 212 n, and 213 / *SV1* XIII, 284, 291 n, and 292. Also the reference to fate brings to mind Kierkegaard’s conception of the Greeks. Both in *Either/Or*, Part I, and in *The Concept of Anxiety* the Greek consciousness is seen as determined by its relation to fate. See *EO1*, 143–156 / *SV1* I, 120–133, and *CA*, 96–97 and 103–104 / *SV1* IV, 366–367 and 373.
with this Climacus writes: “All paganism consists in this, that God is related directly to a human being, as the remarkably striking to the amazed.” But although the pagan worships an idol, the good in him was that he had a relationship to a living god. Climacus writes:

In paganism, the direct relation is idolatry; in Christendom everyone indeed knows that God cannot manifest himself in this way. But this knowledge is not inwardness at all, and in Christendom it can certainly happen with a rote knower that he becomes utterly ‘without God in the world,’ which was not the case in paganism, where there was still the untrue relation of idolatry. Idolatry is certainly a dismal substitute, but that the rubric ‘God’ disappears completely is even more mistaken.

One may compare this with what Vigilius Haufniensis writes in *The Concept of Anxiety* about the difference between naïve paganism and modern spiritlessness:

In spiritlessness there is no anxiety, because it is too happy, too content, and too spiritless for that. But this is a very lamentable reason, and paganism differs from spiritlessness in that the former is qualified toward spirit and the latter away from spirit. Paganism is, if I may say so, the absence of spirit, and thus quite different from spiritlessness. To that extent, paganism is much to be preferred. Spiritlessness is the stagnation of spirit and the caricature of ideality. Spiritlessness, therefore, is not dumb when it comes to repetition by rote, but it is dumb in the sense in which salt is said to be so.

Thus, just like Kierkegaard in his dissertation, Climacus and Haufniensis partly affirm the point of view of Romanticism that was brought out in *The Concept of Irony*: in a sense the bourgeois

\[229\] *CUP*, 245 / *SV I VII*, 206.

\[230\] *CUP*, 246 / *SV I VII*, 207. (Translation slightly altered.)

\[231\] *CA*, 95 / *SV IV*, 365.
modernity, the “paganism within Christendom,” means stagnation from the poetical religiousness of immediate paganism. It is an illusion to worship, for example, the statue of Pallas Athene as God, but it is a more complete illusion to rely on one’s finite understanding only and to give up worshiping God altogether. The famous example, which Climacus uses to illuminate the subjective dimension of truth, should be understood in this connection:

If someone who lives in the midst of Christendom enters, with knowledge of the true idea of God, the house of God, the house of true God, and prays, but prays in untruth, and if someone lives in an idolatrous land but prays with all the passion of infinity, although his eyes are resting upon the image of an idol—where, then, is there more truth? The one prays in truth to God although he is worshiping an idol; the other prays in untruth to the true God and is therefore in truth worshiping an idol.

In the modern spiritless age the passionate, dreaming imagination that anticipated the true God is replaced by finite common sense; but thereby one has done away with God altogether.

In the theory of stages, however, finite common sense (endelig Forstandigheid, existence based on finite understanding), i.e. the sphere of commonsense existence, still signifies a step forward. Presumably this is because there is more reflection and, consequently, more consciousness of the self in it. As we saw in The Concept of Irony, the ancient Greek culture also had to go through a phase of finite reflection (the phase of Sophistry) in order to become conscious (through the irony of Socrates) of the finitude and temporality of all human representation and of the infinite and eternal that transcends it. Similarly every human individual must first become prudent and reflective, in order to then become infinitely passionate and enthusiastic. That seems to be the reason

232 CA, 94 / SV1 IV, 364. (Translation slightly altered.)
233 CUP, 201 / SV1 VII, 168. (Translation slightly altered.)
why Climacus sets the sphere of finite common sense higher than
the sphere of immediacy. However, in other respects he does
not have much good to say about it and its manifestations in the
modern culture. What Climacus writes about worldly wisdom
\textit{(den verdslige Leve-Viisdom)}, sagaciousness \textit{(Kloeg)}, and bourgeois-
philistinism \textit{(Spidsborgerlighed)} resembles what Magister Kierke-
gaard wrote about the age that was “totally fossilized in finite so-
cial forms,” and about the miserable teleology, which “many peo-

\footnote{Climacus does not explicate why the phase of finite common sense is needed. 
However, in the end of \textit{Two Ages} Kierkegaard outlines a development that 
corroborates the interpretation above. He writes: “Antecedent to inspired, 
enthusiastic action are: first of all, the immediate, spontaneous inspiration, then 
the period of prudence \textit{(Klogskabens Tid)}, which, because immediate inspiration 
does not deliberate \textit{(Intet beregner, does not calculate)}, seems to be superior 
by virtue of its ingenuity in deliberation, and then finally the highest and most 
intensive enthusiasm which follows on the heels of prudence and therefore 
perceives what is the most prudent thing to do but rejects it and thereby gains 
the intensity of infinite enthusiasm.” Kierkegaard takes Socrates as an example 
of this highest, imprudent enthusiasm that acts “against the understanding 
\textit{(Forstanden)}”: “For example, Socrates was not a man of immediate enthusiasm; 
on the contrary, he was sufficiently prudent to perceive what he should do to be 
acquitted [from the charges raised against him], but he disdained acting accord-
ingly.” (\textit{TA}, 111 / \textit{SV} VIII, 103–104.) In other words, if there were not life 
fomed by finite understanding and prudence in the first place, it would be 
impossible to give it up in the name of something higher. Constantin Constant-
tius also outlines a similar development, in his draft for a letter to Johan Ludvig 
Heiberg. There Constantius explains to a rather obtuse Heiberg that the repeti-
tion his book \textit{Repetition} really was about is the repetition of individual freedom 
(\textit{R}, 288–289 / \textit{Pap} IV B 111, pp. 263–265). He explains that freedom has its 
history not only in the history of the world, but also in the life of an individual. 
In individual history freedom passes through several stages in order to attain 
itself. Freedom is first qualified as desire \textit{(Lyst). Second it is qualified as sagacity 
\textit{(Klogskab)} and only after that is it qualified in relation to itself. (\textit{R}, 301–302 /
\textit{Pap} IV B 117, pp. 281–282.)}
ple worship as an idol that demands infinite endeavor as its legitimate sacrifice."

As stated above, the immediate person’s immediate reaction to misfortune is poetical (to escape into poetry) or poetical-religious (to worship an idol). Trying to avoid poetical and religious illusions, finite understanding provides a more prudent, piecemeal method of handling life. Climacus explains that when immediacy in the existing individual receives an injury, a crowd of experienced and commonsensical people, of “tinkers and patchers,” shows up and “with the help of probability and grounds of comfort rivets the scraps or holds the rags together. Life goes on; advice is sought from sagacious men of ecclesiastic or secular rank, and it all becomes a muddle—one relinquishes the poetic and does not grasp the religious.”

With his reference to “tinkers and patchers,” Climacus suggests that finite solutions to the problems of life eventually turn out to be insufficient. Trying to avoid illusions, the commonsense people themselves fall prey to an illusion, namely, the illusion that the finitude is all and that they are able to govern it with the help of their understanding. This is a comic illusion in that there is a comic contradiction between the self-important self-confidence of the commonsense man and his actual ignorance and helplessness in the face of a deceptive existence. Climacus writes:

> Every individual who does not live either poetically or religiously is obtuse. Why obtuse? Those sagacious and experienced people who know everything, who have a remedy for everything and advice for everyone—are they obtuse? And wherein lies their obtusity? Their obtusity is that, after they have lost the poetic illusion, they do not

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236 CUP, 443 / SV1 VII, 385.
have enough imagination and imagination-passion to penetrate the mirage of probability and the reliability of finite teleology, all of which breaks up as soon as the infinite stirs. If religiousness is an illusion, then there are three kinds of illusion: the illusion of poetry, the beautiful illusion of immediacy...; the comic illusion of obtusity; and the happy [salige, blessed] illusion of religiousness...[T]he worldly wisdom about life...is...equally comic whether it calculates correctly or calculates incorrectly, because all its calculating is a delusion, a busyness within the chimerical notion that there is something certain in the world of finitude.\footnote{CUP, 457–458 / SVI VII, 397–398.}

Climacus claims that the reliability of finite teleology breaks up “as soon as infinity stirs,” and thus there is nothing certain in the world of finitude. To back up these claims Climacus appeals to the wisdom of Socrates. Like Magister Kierkegaard in The Concept of Irony, Climacus maintains that Socrates had grasped the infinite in the form of ignorance and that he maintained this idea of ignorance everywhere.\footnote{Ibid and CUP, 83–84 / SVI VII, 64–65 together with SKS K7, 416. Cf. CI, 169 and 175–176 / SVI XIII, 252–253 and 258.} For Climacus, this makes Socrates a paradigm of an existing subjective thinker. Such a thinker is aware that the given, factual existence (Tilværelse) and his own existence (Existsents) are continually in the process of becoming and that, therefore, only the infinite and the eternal is certain. But at the same time he is aware that, while partaking of the changeable finitude and temporality, a human being cannot attain certain knowledge on the infinite and the eternal. Moreover, an existing subjective thinker is constantly aware that his finite existence is transient and fragile; his existence is at every moment on the brink of vanishing into nothing, for him the possibility of death is present at every
moment. His conclusion from this uncertainty is his continual ethical-religious striving.\(^{239}\)

But if finite existence is so fragile, why is an existing subjective thinker like Socrates such a rarity among modern philosophers\(^{240}\) and among modern men in general? This is because human commonsensicality makes most individuals forget the negativity of finite existence. Climacus explains that whereas the existing subjective thinker keeps the wound of negativity ever open and, consequently, keeps striving infinitely, for most people there comes a moment in life, when they have reached their goal and found what they were searching for: “They marry, they enter occupations, in consequence of which they must out of decency finish something, must have results (because shame before people bids them to have results; what modesty before the god \([\text{Guden}]\) might bid is given far less thought). So they believe that they actually have completed their task, or they must believe it out of custom and habit...”\(^{241}\) In this way, the significant others and shared customs protect the finite common sense against the infinite ethical-religious dimension of existence. Instead of religious earnestness in front of God, men of common sense tend to have just bourgeois earnestness. Climacus writes: “Many a man believes he is earnest because he has a wife and children and burdensome business affairs. But this does not necessarily mean that he has religious earnestness; his earnestness might also be sullenness and ill humor.”\(^{242}\)

In itself there is, perhaps, nothing wrong with being concerned about wife and children; such concern may even lead a man to-

\(^{239}\) CUP, 81–85 / SVI VII, 62–66. As will be noted below, in contrast to Magister Kierkegaard, Climacus considers Socrates as an ethicist.


\(^{241}\) CUP, 85 / SVI VII, 66.

\(^{242}\) CUP, 495 / SVI VII, 430. (Translation slightly altered.)
ward ethical and religious questions. But in bourgeois mentality, customs and the relationship to “the others” also tend to obscure the deep care for other individuals that may lead into the ethical and that essentially belongs to it. According to Climacus, the social determination may in effect bereave the person of his humanity:

Or is it not the case that...a person might very well live on, marry, be respected and esteemed as husband, father, and captain of the popinjay shooting club, without discovering God in his work, without ever receiving any impression of the infinitude of the ethical, because he managed...with custom and tradition in the city where he lived? Just as a mother admonishes her child who is about to attend a party, “Now, mind your manners and watch the other polite children and behave as they do,” so he, too, could live on and behave as he saw others behave. He would never do anything first and would never have any opinion unless he first knew that others had it, because ‘the others’ would be his first...Such a person...could perhaps live in a Christian country, know how to bow his head every time God’s name was mentioned, perhaps also see God in the nature if he was in the company of others who saw God; in short, well, he could be a congenial partygoer [Selskabsmand, association man, organization man]—and yet he would be deceived by the direct relation to truth, to the ethical, to God. If one were to portray such a person in an imaginary construction, he would be a satire on what it is to be a human being. It is really the God-relationship that makes a human being a human being, but this is what he would lack...[H]e would be

243 Somewhat unexpectedly the humorist (and bachelor?) Climacus seems to be a case in point. I refer to his sympathetic sorrow for the orphan and the grandfather that gives him the motive of tackling the ethical and religious issues. See CUP, 234–243 / SVI VII, 197–204.
244 Cf. TA, 89 / SVI VIII, 83: “It will do no good to establish all sorts of organizations [Selskab paa Selskab], for negatively something superior is introduced even though the myopatic organization man [Selskabsmand] cannot see it.”
more like a puppet character that very deceptively imitates all the human externalities—would even have children with his wife.\textsuperscript{245}

Presumably the solicitude that such a "puppet character" may have for his wife and children is bound to be rather impersonal and shallow.

Thus, the finite common sense appears to be guided, guarded, and protected against the infinite by imitation and comparison. The commonsense man compares himself with his likes, and the criterions with which he measures his worth are social ones. However, maintains Climacus, “it is simply unethical to have one’s life in the comparative, the relative, in the external, and to have the police court, the conciliation court, a newspaper, or some of Copenhagen’s dignitaries, or the urban rabble, be the highest court with regard to oneself.”\textsuperscript{246} “The ethical mistake is to use a relative social criterion in self-appraisal instead of the absolute one:

Bourgeois-philistinism always has its roots in the use of the relative as the absolute...In Copenhagen, people laugh at being the best man in Køge, but to be that in Copenhagen is just as ridiculous, because the ethical and ethical-religious has nothing at all to do with the comparative. Every comparative criterion, be it that of Køge or Copenhagen or of our age or of this century, if it is supposed to be the absolute, is bourgeois-philistinism.”\textsuperscript{247}

Moral relativism seems to be also more generally the problem with finite common sense. The individual is just as much without absolute telos (goal, end) in the commonsense existence as he is in the immediate existence and, in consequence, he is determined exclusively by his finite surroundings. The individual is “in immediacy and to that extent is actually in the relative ends absolutely.”\textsuperscript{248}

\textsuperscript{245} CUP, 244–245 / SVI VII, 205–206.
\textsuperscript{246} CUP, 530 / SVI VII, 462.
\textsuperscript{247} CUP, 547 / SVI VII, 477.
\textsuperscript{248} CUP, 431 / SVI VII, 374.
Accordingly, Climacus writes about “the directness of immediacy and the relative directness of reflection.” In other words, although the commonsense man has reflection, he is still “directly” determined by his social and historical surroundings in that he has no essential ethical-religious relationship to the eternal and infinite that would break up the directness.

For these reasons Climacus maintains that the individual must pass through the *confinium* (the border territory) or the intermediary stage of *irony* as he advances from the immediate, aesthetic spheres to the ethical and religious spheres. According to Climacus, irony belongs to the necessary preconditions of ethical existence: “I believe that if the ethical is *quod erat demonstratum* [that which was to be demonstrated], then irony, pathos, and dialectic are *quod desideratur* [that which is wanted].”

In irony the subject withdraws from temporality into the eternal, but at the same time he remains conscious that he exists in temporality. Echoing Magister Kierkegaard’s view in *The Concept of Irony*, Climacus maintains that irony is not just a style of speaking but “an existence qualification.” It is “the infinite” within the person and he “who has essential irony has it all day long.” In irony the subject constantly joins the thought of infinity together with the finite existence: “The irony emerges by continually joining the particulars of the finite with the ethical infinite requirement and allowing the contradiction to come into existence.”

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249 *CUP*, 432 / *SVI* VII, 375.
250 See *CUP*, 531 / *SVI* VII, 463.
251 In the theological faculty of the University of Copenhagen the grade of the student was sometimes put temporarily into *confinium* between two grades after the written examination. Then, after the oral examination, the grade was either raised or lowered. (*SKS* K4, 288.)
252 *CUP*, 153 / *SVI* VII, 126.
253 Climacus writes that essential to irony is “recollection’s withdrawal from temporality into the eternal (*CUP*, 272 / *SVI* VII, 231).”
254 *CUP*, 503–504 / *SVI* VII, 438.
ironist is able “to join together the absolutely different (such as the conception of God with going out to the amusement park).”

The ground of irony is that human existence (Existents) is a synthesis of the eternal and the temporal, the infinite and the finite. The human subject participates in the changeable existence (Tilværelse), but he is at the same time related to the eternal and infinite that transcends it. The ironist has become conscious of this. In the light of the eternal and infinite he sees the “negativity” in the finite and temporal; in other words, he sees the transient, the purposeless, bad, and the evil that will be negated in the process of becoming. In consequence he will not fully trust the finite and the temporal. But he cannot fully trust his conceptions

255 CUP, 502 / SV1 VII, 436.

256 Tilværelse is rendered in the English translation as “being there” (cf. German Dasein) or as “existence.” (See CUP, 81 / SV1 VII, 63.) Climacus nowhere defines what he means by Tilværelse and what the distinction is between Tilværelse and Existents. But his use of the term here and in other contexts suggests that with Tilværelse he refers to the changeable existence, in which human beings are involved, in contrast to, on the one hand, the ideal and unchangeable being (Væren) of ideas, concepts, and essences, and on the other, the concrete existence (Existents) of human subjects that relates itself to both of the two. (See PF, 10 n, 41 n, 43, and 73–74 / SV1 IV, 180 n.1, 208–209 n. 211, and 236–237; CUP, 189–190 / SV1 VII, 157–158.) That this is the meaning of the term for Climacus is also suggested by Kierkegaard’s use of the term in The Book on Adler (Bogen om Adler, a manuscript from 1846–1847). There he writes: “[L]et us imagine that many go on living as Christians and actually are pagans, inasmuch as existence [Tilværelse], the surrounding world, has transformed itself into a huge illusion that again and again in every way strengthens them in the notion that they are Christians.” (BA, 133 / Pap. VII 2 B 235, p. 219.)

257 Climacus does not explicitly state that the negative includes these ethical-religious qualities, but the context suggests that it does. On the one hand, he writes that if the existing subjective thinker is “continually just as negative as positive, he is continually striving” (CUP, 85 / SV1 VII, 66). On the other hand, he writes: “The continued striving is the expression of the existing subject’s ethical life-view. The continued striving must therefore not be understood metaphysically... (CUP, 121–122 / SV1 VII, 100).”
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of the eternal and the infinite, either. As an existing (existerende) human being he is involved in the changeable existence and partakes in its negativity. Consequently, the eternal that has its seat in him also becomes involved in the process of becoming and comes to partake in the negative. Climacus writes:

The negativity that is in existence [Tilværelsen], or rather the negativity of the existing [existerende] subject...is grounded in the subject’s synthesis, in his being an existing infinite spirit. The infinite and the eternal are the only certainty, but since it is in the subject, it is in existence [Tilværelse], and the first expression for it is its illusiveness and the prodigious contradiction that the eternal becomes, that it comes into existence [blive til].

The existing subjective thinker draws his conclusions from this negativity. He “renders the form of existence [Tilværelse] in his own existence [Existents],” that is, he reacts to the continuous becoming with his continuous ethical striving.

Climacus writes that the changeable existence (Tilværelse) is a system for God, but it cannot be a system for any existing (existerende) spirit. Only God, who is outside the changeable existence and yet present in it, “who in his eternity is forever concluded (for evigt afsluttet) and yet includes the existence (Tilværelse) within himself,” is able to conceive existence as a concluded system. A human being, who is himself situated in the changeable existence, is unable to comprehend it from the point of view of eternity, sub specie aeterni. Therefore, he cannot know how the eternal and infinite will manifest itself in the temporal and finite world and, consequently, he has no positive speculative knowledge that would help him to orient himself in the changeable existence. On the

258 CUP, 81–82 / SV1 VII, 63.
259 CUP, 84 / SV1 VII, 65–66.
260 CUP, 85 / SV1 VII, 66.
261 CUP, 118–119 / SV1 VII, 97–98.
other hand, if he is aware of his negativity and of his ignorance with regard to the eternal and infinite, there is always something positive in him, since the eternal and infinite are indirectly present in his awareness of the negative.\textsuperscript{262}

The positive in irony is that with its help the individual may struggle against his negativity and against the relativity that keeps him as captive. According to Climacus, a genuine ironist does “not let himself be caught in any relativity.”\textsuperscript{263} He writes:

If the observer is able to catch him in a relativity that he does not have the strength to comprehend ironically, then he is not really an ironist. In other words, if irony is not taken in the decisive sense, every human being is basically ironical. As soon as a person who has his life in a certain relativity (and this definitely shows that he is not ironical) is placed outside it in a relativity that he considers to be lower (a nobleman, for example, in a group of peasants, a professor in the company of parish clerks, a city millionaire together with beggars, a royal coachman in a room with peat cutters, a cook at a manor house together with women who do weeding, etc.), then he is ironical—that is, he is not ironical, since his irony is only the illusory superiority of relativity…[T]he whole thing is only a game within certain presupposition, and the inhumanity is distinguishable in the inability of the person concerned to perceive himself ironically, and the inauthenticity is distinguishable by the same person’s obsequiousness when a relativity shows up that is higher than his. This, alas, is what the world calls modesty—the ironist, he is proud!\textsuperscript{264}

The ironist is proud in that he abstracts himself, and every human individual he deals with, from finitude, and does not behave towards them according to their temporal and finite distinctions. Instead, he treats them as human beings capable of relating to the eternal and capable of asserting themselves as selves. Irony lacks

\textsuperscript{263} \textit{CUP}, 502 / \textit{SVI VII}, 436.
\textsuperscript{264} \textit{CUP}, 502 n / \textit{SVI VII}, 436–437 n.
what the immediate people regard as humility and sympathy. According to Climacus, irony “is self-assertion [Selvhævdelse], and its sympathy is therefore an altogether indirect sympathizing, not with any one person, but with the idea of self-assertion as every human being’s possibility.”

Thus irony may be considered as hard, destructive, and irresponsible, but in connection with immediacy it is legitimate in that it makes room for humanity: irony “levels everything on the basis of abstract humanity.” However, irony should not become total in its abstraction. Irony is legitimized only as “an existence-art” that keeps hold of the balance between the finite and the infinite. Climacus writes:

Irony is legitimized in connection with immediacy, because the balance, not as abstraction but as an existence-art, is higher than immediacy. Therefore only an existing ironist is legitimized in connection with immediacy. Like all abstraction, total irony once and for all...is unauthorized in connection with every existence sphere. In other words, irony certainly is abstraction and the abstract compounding of things [den abstrakte Sammensætten], but the legitimacy of the existing ironist is that he himself, existing, expresses it, that he keeps his life in it and does not dally with grandness of irony and have his own life in philistinism, because then his comic is illegitimate.

What Climacus defends here seems to be the mastered irony that Kierkegaard advocated in his dissertation. Irony may be used in different spheres of existence, for example, a poet may use it for aesthetic purposes. But no matter in which sphere irony is used, the ironist must keep hold of the concrete actuality. Otherwise he gets lost in the infinity of abstract imagination or thought—and at the same time ends up living the good old philistine way in the finite actuality.

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265 CUP, 553 / SVI VII, 482.
266 CUP, 448 n / SVI VII, 390 n.
267 CUP, 520–521 / SVI VII, 454.
Only an existing ironist is able to show the negativity of the finite and to point towards the infinite. However, such an ironist may still not be an ethicist. According to Climacus, an ironist comprehends "the ethical infinite requirement," and "is also able to talk about himself as a third person, to join himself as a vanishing particular together with the absolute requirement." But "it is still not certain that he is an ethicist," for he does not necessarily "relate himself within himself to the absolute requirement." In other words, we may imagine someone who appears to use irony for ethical purposes, but who in fact just wants to liberate himself from the given customs and practices of his society. The possibility is familiar to us from The Concept of Irony, in which the paradigmatic ethicist, Socrates, was presented as a thoroughbred ironist, and as a true forerunner of the Romantic aesthetes. However, Climacus, who is an ironist and humorist himself, does not take this example seriously:

What, then, is irony, if one wants to call Socrates an ironist and does not, like Magister Kierkegaard, intentionally or unintentionally [bevidst eller ubevæist] want to bring out only the one side? Irony is the unity of ethical passion, which in inwardness infinitely accentuates one’s own I in relation to the ethical requirement—and culture [Dannelse], which in externality infinitely abstracts from the personal I as a finitude included among all other finitudes and particulars. An effect of this abstraction is that no one notices the first, and this is precisely the art, and through it the true infinitizing of the first [i.e. the infinite ethical passion] is conditioned.269

So Socrates was an ethicist, but a civilized ethicist, an ethicist with cultural awareness, who was conscious of the contradiction between his infinite ethical passion, and his limited means of expressing it in finite reality. In consequence Socrates hid his per-

269 CUP, 503 / SV1 VII, 437–438. (Translation slightly altered.)
sonal ethical passion under irony, used it as his incognito, with the result that no one noticed his infinite ethical passion.

But is it really true that no one noticed the infinite ethical passion of Socrates? Did not Xenophon and Plato write about the wisdom and temperance of Socrates, and about his valiance as a soldier and uprightness as a citizen? Is not his infinite ethical passion directly evident in his life-conduct and in the stories that describe it? No, it is not, and this is the point of both Magister Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Irony* and of Johannes Climacus in *Postscript*. What we perceive directly is just external action, and the ethical that we perceive indirectly is in fact in our own enthusiastic imagination: we imagine the spirit in which the action was performed. Socrates as a cultured, experienced, self-reflecting, ironic person was thoroughly aware of this and tried to share his awareness with others the only way it may be shared in truth—through irony. With his irony he underscored the inevitable incommensurability between the infinite ethical requirement and the finite acts in the external that attempt to fulfill it. Climacus writes:

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270 See *CUP*, 157 / *SVI* VII, 130: “If an individual sees something ethical, it is the ethical in himself, and a reflection of this induces him to see what he nevertheless does not see.” A consequence of this is that Climacus has no binding evidence that Socrates had ethical passion in his inwardness. He makes a claim, presents a hypothesis that seems to him probable. Ultimately, however, the question whether an ironist such as Socrates actually was an ethicist or not is without decisive significance for Climacus. He essentially regards the pondering of such questions as cognitively irresolvable and ethically dubious: “With regard to the observational question about ethical interiority, irony and hypocrisy as antitheses (but both expressing the contradiction that the outer is not the inner—hypocrisy by appearing good, irony by appearing bad) emphasize that actuality and deception are equally possible, that deception can reach just as far as actuality. Only the individual himself can know which is which. To ask about this ethical interiority in another individual is already unethical as it is a diversion. (*CUP*, 323 / *SVI* VII, 278.)”
But why does the ethicist use irony as his incognito? Because he comprehends the contradiction between the mode in which he exists in his inner being and his not expressing it in his outer appearance. The ethicist certainly becomes open insofar as he exhausts himself in the tasks of factual actuality, but the immediate person also does this, and what makes the ethicist an ethicist is the movement by which he inwardly joins his outward life together with the infinite requirement of the ethical, and this is not directly apparent. 271

An ethicist lets his ethical passion inform his outward conduct. But at the same time he is aware that the infinite passion, without which his action fails to be ethical, will never manifest itself adequately in his finite actions. To underscore this—the infinite dimension of the ethical—the ethicist uses irony as his incognito. Such use of irony does not take anything away from ethical action, but on the contrary infinitizes the ethical task and protects it from unethical garrulosity.

Climacus writes that the ethicist also uses irony as an incognito because he is aware of the difference between his ethical attitude and the attitude of immediate persons. He is “aware that what engages him absolutely does not engage the others absolutely” and in order to protect the ethical passion in his inwardness he “places the comic in between.” 272 But does this not mean that he isolates himself from his fellow beings and from the world, where he exists, and that he gives up sharing the ethical with the others? It does not, for while irony protects the ethical passion, at the same time it is the only way to communicate the ethical to commonsense men. If immediate persons have their lives in the transient relativities of finitude, the ethicist must first make them aware of the difference between the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal, the human and the divine, and irony is the way to do that. With

272 CUP, 505 / SV I VII, 439.
the help of irony the ethicist communicates the positive indirectly through the negative.  

But mastered irony is not only the means of ethical communication. Irony is also needed as an element in Christian existence-communication (Existents-Meddelelse). The task of Christian irony is to make entering into Christianity again what it actually is: difficult. The victim of such Christian irony is the self-complacency of modern Christians in general and Hegelian philosophers and theologians in particular.

In *The Concept of Irony* Kierkegaard commends mastered irony as a guide that takes away our illusion of possessing the positive truth: He writes: "Ironic as the negative is the way; it is not the truth but the way. Anyone who has a result as such does not possess it, since he does not have the way. When irony now lends a hand, it brings the way, but not the way whereby someone fancying himself to have the achievement comes to possess it, but the way along which the achievement deserts him." The passage captures well how irony prepares the way for the Christian existence-communication in the writings of Climacus. In the *Philosophical Fragments*, a modest, private thinker Johannes Climacus presents a new hypothesis for philosophical discussion, a way of thinking that his Hegelian contemporaries may not have thought about at all. The hypothesis, the new imaginary construction, turns out to be the Christian revelation in its heterogeneity with all philosophical reflection. By clothing the Christian revelation

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273 I rely here mainly on *CUP*, 72–80 and 82–84 / *SV* VII, 54–62 and 64–65 where Climacus discusses the art of indirect communication as practiced by Socrates and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.
274 On Christianity as an existence-communication, see *CUP*, 379–380 / *SV* VII, 328–330. On its difference to the ethical existence-communication, see *CUP*, 572–573 / *SV* VII, 499.
276 *CI*, 327–328 / *SV* XIII, 391.
ironically into the form of a new scientific hypothesis, Climacus brings out the contrast between philosophical science based on human reason and the divine revelation, and makes vacuous all attempts by the Hegelian philosophers and theologians to show an identity between the two.\textsuperscript{277} In Postscript Climacus refers himself to the indefatigable activity of irony in his \textit{Philosophical Fragments}:

The contrast of form, the teasing resistance of the imaginary construction to the content, the inventive audacity (which even invents Christianity)... the indefatigable activity of irony, the parody of speculative thought in the entire plan, the satire of making efforts as if something \textit{ganz Ausentordentliches und zwar Neues} [altogether extraordinary, that is, new] were to come of them, whereas what always emerges is old-fashioned orthodoxy in its rightful severity...\textsuperscript{278}

Then Climacus explains, why all this is needed in the communication of Christianity. The book was not written for non-knowers but for people who know, and know all too well, what Christianity is all about. The ironic form is needed to take away the illusion of knowledge that actually keeps the person from believing in the Christian truth. Climacus writes:

Because everyone knows the Christian truth, it has gradually become such a triviality that a primitive impression of it is acquired only with difficulty. When this is the case, the art of being able to communicate eventually becomes the art of being able to take away or to trick something away from someone. This seems strange and very ironic, and yet I believe I have succeeded in expressing exactly what I mean. When a man has filled his mouth so full of food that for this reason he cannot eat and it must end with his dying of hunger, does giving

\textsuperscript{277} On the different grounds for the choice of indirect communication in \textit{Philosophical Fragments}, see Müller 1979.  
\textsuperscript{278} CUP, 275 n / SVI VII, 234 n. 
food to him consist in stuffing his mouth even more or, instead, in
taking a little away so that he can eat?\textsuperscript{279}

Irony is used in the \textit{Fragments} as a way that takes away our illu-
sion of possessing the positive truth quite in accordance with the
program delineated by Magister Kierkegaard. Just as Socrates used
irony in making his contemporaries rethink and re-appropriate
virtue, so Climacus uses irony in making his contemporaries re-
think and re-appropriate faith.

So also in \textit{Concluding Unscientific Postscript}, where in the mid-
dle of a nominally Christian culture Climacus re-establishes the
question, how could he, “an ordinary human being like most folk,”
become a Christian?\textsuperscript{280} Climacus tells us how he assumed this
ironic calling. Smoking cigars outside the café in Frederiksberg
Gardens one afternoon, he pondered on his situation in his effi-
ciently progressing age. He said to himself:

\begin{quote}
You are...becoming an old man without being anything and without
actually undertaking anything. On the other hand, wherever you
look in literature or in life, you see the names and figures of celebri-
ties, the prized and highly acclaimed people, prominent or much dis-
cussed, the many benefactors of the age who know how to benefit
humankind by making life easier and easier, some by railroads, others
by omnibuses and steamships, others by telegraph, others by easily
understood surveys and brief publications about everything worth
knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age who by virtue of
thought systematically make spiritual existence easier and easier and
yet more and more meaningful—and what are you doing?\textsuperscript{281}
\end{quote}

Suddenly Climacus realizes what his task is in the given historical
situation:

\textsuperscript{279} \textit{CUP}, 275 n / \textit{SV1 VII}, 234 n.
\textsuperscript{280} \textit{CUP}, 15–16 / \textit{SV1 VII}, 6–7.
\textsuperscript{281} \textit{CUP}, 186 / \textit{SV1 VII}, 155.
You must do something, but since with your limited capabilities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm as the others have, take it upon yourself to make something more difficult. This idea pleased me enormously; it also flattered me that for this effort I would be loved and respected, as much as anyone else, by the entire community... Out of love of humankind, out of despair over my awkward predicament of having achieved nothing and of being unable to make anything easier than it had already been made, out of genuine interest in those who make everything easy, I comprehended that it was my task: to make difficulties everywhere.²⁸²

The calling of Climacus seems a bit ironical, and if we would not have his own word that at bottom he is a humorist with sympathy for his fellow beings,²⁸³ we might be tempted to think that he just wants to be nasty to his good-natured contemporaries. In accordance with the plan, then, Climacus makes becoming a Christian difficult for human individuals in Postscript. As an ironist he pays attention to the question “how”: how does an individual become a Christian? Whether there is something wrong with the doctrine itself or whether it is sound Climacus leaves undecided. His problem concerns only the relation of temporally existing subject to the Christian doctrine: how may he enter into actual relation to this doctrine. As Climacus notes himself, in a situation in which people already consider themselves as Christians and only dispute the right understanding of the Christian doctrine, the question is ironical.²⁸⁴ In other words, Climacus makes room for authentic Christianity by turning attention to the relation of the subject to Christianity. Irony makes this relation problematic. As in the hands of Socrates, so in the hands of Cli-

²⁸² CUP, 186–187 / SVI VII, 155.
²⁸³ CUP, 617 with 553 / SVI VII, 537 with 482.
mokus irony is the tool with which to wake up the theorists from their abstract disputes into the tasks of their personal existence.

Let us sum up the results of our reading by considering the situatedness of the subject in the immediate, commonsense, and ironic existence-spheres.

The immediate person is in immediate relation to his surroundings and to his fellow beings.\(^{285}\) His communication with other human beings is entirely immediate and direct.\(^{286}\) In his interaction with the world around him, he relies on his capabilities, powers, and luck.\(^{287}\) If misfortune meets him, he considers it as coming directly from the external world and sees no meaning in it.\(^{288}\) The immediate person is not really aware that his existence is based on the eternal and infinite, in other words, that it is sustained by God and that God acts as the intermediary between him and the world, and between him and the other subjects. In other words, the immediate person lacks a life-view that would relate the temporal and finite existence to the absolute that forms its basis.\(^{289}\)

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\(^{285}\) CUP, 432 and 432 n.2 / SVI VII, 375 and 375 n.2.
\(^{286}\) CUP, 74 / SVI VII, 57.
\(^{287}\) This does not rule out that he may nod his head when the pastor preaches on Sunday that a human being is capable of nothing without God. In his immediate relation to the word that he hears, he is convinced; in actual life, however, he does not keep hold of this thought, but relies directly on his powers and luck. (see CUP, 467–472 / SVI VII, 406–410.)
\(^{289}\) As a humorist, who exists in the confinium between the ethical and the religious existence, Climacus has such a life-view himself. Climacus tells us that he is a humorist (CUP, 501 / SVI VII, 435), and that a humorist “continually (...at every time of the day, wherever he is and whatever he thinks or undertakes) joins the conception of God together with something else and brings out the contradiction... (CUP, 505 / SVI VII, 439)”
In consequence the immediate person “is in the relative ends absolutely.”

In the humorous life-view of Climacus that forms the basis for the analysis of different stages of existence, the subject is situated in the finite and temporal world. It is because he is situated there that the immediate person has his life directed at relative ends in contrast to the absolute end. The immediate person is determined by his situation in time and space, by his history and his environment, and consequently has his goals determined by the finite and temporal states of affairs around him. What would Climacus expect, instead? He would expect that the person relates himself absolutely to his absolute goal and relatively to his relative goals. However, Climacus would not expect that the person escapes his given situatedness in the world of relativities. As long as he lives, the human subject is situated in this world and has no way to escape his situatedness. Even if he escaped into a monastery in order to worship God in his inwardness, he would not escape the relativities and externalities of life. Thus Climacus suggests another solution. In his inwardness the person should relate his existence to the absolute, while he keeps living in the world of relativities.

A person who lives in full immediacy, without reflecting on his existence at all, naturally lacks a conscious relation to the absolute, to God. But such an inward relation is also lacking in the commonsense person. From the point of view of Climacus, the commonsense person is still in an immediate relationship to the life around him, even if he relates to his environment through reflec-

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290 CUP, 431 / SV1 VII, 374.
292 CUP, 407–409 / SV1 VII, 353–355. According to Climacus, “The monastic movement wants to express interiority by an outwardness that is supposed to be interiority. Herein lies the contradiction, because to be a monk is just as much something outward as being councilor of justice. (CUP, 409 / SV1 VII, 355.)”
Although he reflects life and his place in it, the commonsense person does not ground his actual existence on the infinite and eternal in his reflection. In everyday life he does not rely on God and he does not determine his existence ethically in relation to God. Instead, he takes his norms from his social and historical environment. The commonsense person reflects himself not in the light of the ethical-religious ideal of a human being, but in the light of “the others.” Through imitation and comparison he adapts himself to his environment and acts in accordance with it without personal responsibility, without ethical self-consciousness, i.e. without conscience.

In the aesthetic stages, i.e. in the stages of immediacy and finite commonsense in which each of us finds himself at least in the beginning of his development, the subject is directly determined by his finite surroundings. It is “natural,” so to speak, for a human being to be at one with his surroundings. It is thus not at all the view of Climacus that the subject naturally exists as an isolated “single individual” separated from his surroundings. On the contrary, one must actively separate oneself from one’s surroundings in order to become a single individual in the pregnant ethical-religious sense of the word. If the person does not have infinite ethical-religious passion, he is completely determined by his background and surroundings, even if he has reflection.

This view on the basic situatedness of the subject is quite in harmony with the view in *The Concept of Irony*. The descriptions complement each other. In *Postscript* the situatedness is depicted from inside, from the point of view of the existing subject; in *The

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293 *CUP*, 432 / *SV I VII*, 375.
295 A similar point has been made by Arne Grøn with respect to the relation to other subjects: the demand to separate oneself from the others derives from the fact that the individual is always already dependent on others. (*Grøn* 1997, 228.)
Chapter 2: The Aesthetic Spheres

Concept of Irony it is investigated from outside, from the point of view of its context. But what Climacus writes about immediate and commonsense existence fits well with Magister Kierkegaard’s description of the immediate life in ancient Greece and of the bourgeois-philistine life in modern Europe, respectively.

The same holds true for ironic existence. The ontological structure that gives ground for irony is the same in both works: on the one hand, there is the changeable existence, on the other, there is the eternal and infinite that transcends it. The two works also agree on what is good in irony: a human being who exists in the historically given actuality, or in *Tilværelse*, cannot have positive knowledge of the absolute, but with the help of irony he may at least remain open for it. In other words, with the help of irony the person may liberate himself from the relativity in which finitude holds him. Both works also consider total abstraction as the danger in irony, and maintain that the ironist should maintain hold of concrete actuality. Irony should be mastered so that it would become “an existence-art” that helps the individual to live poetically. The prerequisites for this are, according to *The Concept of Irony*, a totality-view and ethical striving; according to *Postscript*, culture (*Dannelse*) and ethical passion. Only if the person masters irony with the ethical and situates himself properly into a given actuality, is he able to live as “positively free in the actuality to which he belong.” Thus, the sense of ethical-religious situat-

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edness appears to be the prerequisite for the efficient use of irony in the service of the ethical and the religious.

Any commonsense man in 19th century Europe possesses as cultural heritage the eternal truths of philosophical reason and of Christian faith. But does he possess them personally as this single individual who lives in the temporal actuality? The calling of Climacus is to bring out this question and to do that he uses irony. His apparently frivolous irony performs in fact an earnest task in bringing out the contradiction between our inherited ethical and religious truths and our personal lives.\(^\text{300}\) Irony may actually be seen as a precondition for the authentic understanding and actualization of our inherited possibilities. With the help of irony one must, first, liberate oneself from passive situatedness in the finite and temporal actuality, in order then to situate oneself actively back into that actuality. Assuming that truths that concern our eternal being are passed to us through historical traditions, the personal appropriation of them still requires that the individual isolate himself from his temporal surroundings and faces the eternal as a single individual. Having done that he may then actively re-situate himself into his historical and social actuality in the light of the eternal.

In the following we will see how, after having gone through irony, the subject re-situates himself through the ethical and the religious back into the historical and social actuality. In Kierke-

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\(^{300}\) See \textit{CUP}, 277 n / \textit{SV} I VII, 236 n: “The presence of irony does not necessarily mean that the earnestness is excluded. Only assistant professors assume that. That is, while they otherwise do away with the disjunctive \textit{aut [or]} and fear neither God nor the devil, since they mediate everything—they make an exception of irony; they are unable to mediate that.” We may take this statement of Johannes Climacus as a clue that gives us the key to understand, why Magister Kierkegaard chose irony as the topic of his academic dissertation. The statement gives confirmation for the hypothesis presented above that, despite the appearance, the dissertation was not written completely in Hegelian spirit.
gaard’s scheme, the subject finds his place in the actuality by living poetically either in the ethical-religious or in the Christian way. First we shall investigate the ethical-religious way, as represented by Judge William, whom Johannes Climacus in Postscript holds as a paradigmatic ethicist.
3 Either/Or, Part II

Either/Or (Enten–Eller. Et Livs-Fragment, 1843), published under the pseudonym Victor Eremita, pits against each other the aesthetic and the ethical mode of living poetically. We, the readers, have the option, either to live the life delineated in the papers of the young aesthete, whom Victor Eremita calls A, or to live the way the ethicist Judge William advises A to live in his letters. As Sylvia Walsh has noted, “through the papers of A we get a privileged view of the aesthete’s own attempt to live poetically in a Romantic fashion.” Walsh writes that the possibilities that A places before us “reflect the range and types of interests and attitudes characteristic of the Romantic personality. These run a gamut from attempts to recover a lost immediacy to a preoccupation with subjects having to do with the negativities of life—suffering, grief, boredom, indolence, meaninglessness, anxiety, melancholy, and despair.” The observation of Walsh seems correct: the different writings that make up Part I of Either/Or illustrate the Romantic mode of living poetically that was already analyzed in The Concept of Irony. With Judge William’s letters we move forward to the ethical-religious way of living poetically. We learn how the ethical subject finds his place in the historical world, that is, how the ethical existence described in Concluding Unscientific Postscript is situated in historical actuality.

Part II of Either/Or consists of three letters that Judge William has sent to the young man A. The judge tries to convince his friend of the beauty of the ethical life and, in order to do that, he also tries to take into consideration the obstacles that might pre-

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vent A from choosing the ethical path. With each letter the judge fights harder for his ethical life-view and goes deeper into its ethical and religious prerequisites.

In the first letter entitled “The Esthetic Validity of Marriage,” Judge William writes about love, the favorite theme of A, and argues that the beauty of romantic love may be saved from skeptical reflection only with the help of the religious and the ethical. Judge William is conscious that he lives in a reflective age where people generally have lost their trust in the world. He writes: “Our age reminds one very much of the disintegration of the Greek city-state: everything remains as it is, and yet there is no longer anyone who believes in it. The invisible spiritual bond which gives it validity has vanished.”

In this situation, for example, marriage comes to be regarded just as a civil arrangement contracted for a limited time for the sake of certain finite purposes. As such, marriage loses its beauty and becomes a death trap for romantic love. Judge William, a happily married man himself, assumes that his young friend would be saved if he got married and realized the practical significance of the ethical and religious through it. “Therefore, he wants to show that if marriage is understood ethically and religiously then it has beauty, and a much more powerful beauty than that which romantic love has.” He tries to show how, supported by the religious and the ethical element in marriage, love is able to overcome all the obstacles it faces in everyday life.

In the second letter the tone is one degree more urgent as Judge William exhorts the young man to make a choice between the ethical and the aesthetic way of life: either “truth, justice, and sanctity,” or “lust and natural inclinations, dark passions and per-

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302 EO2, 19 / SVI II, 18. (Translation slightly altered.)
304 EO2, 6–10 / SVI II, 6–10.
305 EO2, 17–94 / SVI II, 16–86.
According to the judge, although the young man prospers in the world of possibilities, he is not doing well in his actual life. Living in reflection and aesthetic possibilities has resulted in emptiness. Poor A does not believe in anything. He despises the philistine morality, but cannot return to a spontaneous immediate existence, either. Judge William, thus, wants to show him the way out. The way goes through the ethical choice and leads to a rejuvenation of life. When the person gives up the hypothetical way of life and takes responsibility for the actuality to which he belongs, he begins to see the beauty of everyday life. Judge William assures A that, far from depriving life of its beauty, the ethical imparts beauty to it. Despite the initial disjunction between the aesthetic and the ethical, then, the ethical turns out to include, cultivate, and develop the aesthetic element in life. From this comes the title of the letter: “The Balance Between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality.”

In Judge William’s life-view the ethical coincides with the religious. It is the religious that rescues the subject from the skepticism of reflection and brings the ethical spirit into institutions, such as marriage. Moreover, in his view it is through relating oneself through repentance to God that a person regains his life. Judge William also believes that God governs the world, where ethical subjects strive to fulfill their tasks. He also seems to agree with the view Magister Kierkegaard brought out in his dissertation: that historical actuality stands in a twofold relation to the subject, partly as a gift that refuses to be rejected, partly as a task.

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307 EO2, 157 / SV1 II, 143.
312 EO2, 96–97, 167, and 282 / SV1 II, 88–89, 152, and 262.
Chapter 3: Either/Or

that wants to be fulfilled.\textsuperscript{313} Such an ethical attitude makes sense in the framework of a religious life-view, in which everything important that happens to the individual in his life is referred to God.\textsuperscript{314} However, sometimes the ethical striving and the religious piety are hard to combine when fulfilling the ethical task is not rewarded in life, but the lot of the righteous and unrighteous turns out to be the same. For example, as in the case of the destruction of Jerusalem, in which the punishment of God fell with equal severity on the innocent as on the guilty.\textsuperscript{315} The third letter, “Ultimatum,” addresses this problem, i.e. the problem of theodicy. It contains a sermon written by a pastor from Jutland. Here the religious piety finds its ultimate sanctuary against skeptical reflection in religious worship, devotion, and reverence. The meaningfulness of ethical-religious life is defended against sceptical reason by the love that a human being has for God.\textsuperscript{316}

In what follows, we will probe the three letters of the judge in order to discover what is involved in the ethical-religious way of living poetically, and how the ethical subject situates himself in the world (subdivision 3.1). In the analysis that follows exegesis (subdivision 3.2), special attention is given to the rationality of the ethical-religious life.\textsuperscript{317}

\textsuperscript{313} CI, 276 / SVI XIII, 348.
\textsuperscript{315} EO2, 341–344 / SVI II, 307–309.
\textsuperscript{316} EO2, 348–354 / SVI II, 313–318.
\textsuperscript{317} The rationality of choosing the ethical option presented in Either/Or, Part II, has become a major issue in Kierkegaard research after Alasdair MacIntyre’s provocative interpretation in his After Virtue (see MacIntyre 1984, 39–43). MacIntyre’s interpretation has been discussed in Davenport & Rudd 2001. Another recent collection of essays on Either/Or, Part II, is Perkins 1995. For understanding the situational aspects of Judge William’s thought, the articles by Edward Mooney and Norman Lillegard are especially helpful (see Mooney 1995 and Lillegaard 1995). In Danish a philosophical analysis by Jørgen Husted on Judge William’s second letter has recently been published (see Husted 1999).
3.1 The Ethical Redemption of the Aesthetic

3.1.1 Love, Reflection, and Marriage

When Judge William delineates his ethical view, he does it by drawing a contrast between the ethical and the aesthetic ways of life. However, it is not a life dominated by exceeding sensuality that he sets the ethical life against. Rather, it is a life dominated by reflection that teaches caution with regard to the changeable world. Judge William appears to think that such reflection, what Climacus calls in Postscript finite common sense (endelig Forstandighed, reliance on finite understanding) has become the dominating element in the life of men. He writes about a reflective age in which, for example, naïve, romantic love is bound to become the object of scorn and irony.

Otherwise, there are not many studies in the research literature that would focus on the life-view of Judge William. Either/Or is universally considered as one of Kierkegaard’s main works and, according to Husted and Habermas, the ethical option in it influenced the existentialist philosophers (Husted 1999, 11, and Habermas 2002, 5–6). However, the ethical-religious view of Judge William does not seem to have received that much attention in its own right. For example, Husted 1999 approaches Judge William’s letter from the point of view of philosophy. On the other hand, Søltoft 2000 reads Judge William from the higher point of view of Christian ethics. (For a critique of Søltoft’s reading, see Kyllåinen 2000, 77–89.) Sometimes Judge William is even considered as a superficial aesthete, i.e. as Kierkegaard’s parody of ethical man (see Liehu 1990, 144–205). This is a pity, since the position of Judge William makes a lot of sense precisely as an ethical-religious thinker, whose position could be considered as more universal and more reasonable than the Christian positions Kierkegaard advances in his later writings. In the following interpretation I read Judge William as such an ethical-religious thinker, whose strength is in addition that he takes the situatedness of human beings into consideration and also venerates what the Romantics held in value, i.e. the poetry of life.

Typical to *romantic love* is that it is spontaneous and immediate. The judge gives examples: “[T]o see her and to love her were one and the same,” and, “though she saw him just once through the slit in the closed window of her maiden’s bower she loved him and him alone in the whole world.”\(^{320}\) Romantic love is based on beauty, “partly on sensuous beauty, partly on the beauty that can be conceived through and in and with the sensuous,” and for that reason it is dependent on natural necessity. At the same time it has a stamp of the eternal, which distinguishes it from lust. The lovers experience a kind of pre-established harmony of hearts: they feel that they are meant for one another from eternity and they are convinced in their hearts that their relationship can never be altered. The problem is that the sensuous is after all not eternal, but momentary, and since romantic love is based on the sensuous, the eternal in love is conditioned by the temporal, and turns out to be illusory. Anyone who reflects a little can easily see that immediate, knightly faithfulness is in fact foolishness. Consequently, what romantic love cannot endure and what it must avoid is reflection.\(^{321}\)

*Reflection* implies awareness of the opposition between the eternal and the possible change in time. In consequence, a reflective person assumes a more prudent attitude towards love. While enjoying the bliss of a momentary sensuous infatuation, he is in control of the situation and of himself. He knows how to appreciate sensuous love, and he is even ready to celebrate it with a wedding, but he will not let himself be deceived by its illusions. He marries if the prospect of living together for quite a while is promising, but at the same time he is wise enough to keep the way out open so that, if a happier option appeared, it would still be possi-


\(^{321}\) *EO2*, 21–22 / *SV1* II, 20–21.
ble to choose it. The result is marriage as a civil arrangement (*børgerlig Indretning*), a marriage contracted temporarily by two independent partners that want to hold on to their independence.\(^{322}\) A reflective person may also contract marriage for all of his life, but only because he has good reasons for that (such as gaining in prosperity or social standing etc.). Judge William notes that such a marriage of convenience (*Fornuftgiftermaal*) may even have an appearance of being moral, since it has neutralized the sensual in marriage.\(^ {323}\)

Now, according to Judge William, the lack of reflectivity is, indeed, a weakness in romantic love. In the reflective age, the fact that romantic love is based on illusion will not go unnoticed. However, love escorted by skeptical reflection and marriage based on rational calculation are not so attractive, either. There is something distorted in love dominated by clever calculation and, if one reflects a little bit more, one comes to think that maybe the clever person becomes deceived after all: in such love both the aesthetic and the ethical are absent. This is how the Romantic ironist like Friedrich Schlegel saw it and this is how A seems to see it, and Judge William does not disagree. However, instead of assuming irony as a total position and falling back to Romantic aestheticism, the judge maintains that reflective love points beyond itself to something higher, namely, to the religious where rational reflection ends.\(^ {324}\)

What lifts love into the higher sphere is seeing it in the right way and taking in earnest its wonderful qualities. It seems as if in romantic love something essential would manifest itself, as if the infinite would be breaking through into the finite. Judge William suggests that this should be taken in earnest. By considering the meaning of the word “first,” he tries to make A see the phenome-

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\(^{322}\) *EO2*, 22–23 / *SV1* II, 21–22.


non of first love in a different light. The word “first,” says the judge, has had and will always have an enormous significance in the world. The “first” can be understood either as referring to a temporal moment or as referring to what is eternal. In the former case it is the past and does not urge the individual on within, but thrusts away so that the individual constantly withdraws more and more from it. In the latter case the first is the present, it is the motivating, infinite impulse in the life of the individual that is always present in its constant unfolding and rejuvenation. It is the latter meaning that the judge wants to attach to the phenomenon of first love: the “first” in first love refers to the eternal and signifies its coming into being in and through falling in love.\(^{325}\)

“[T]hat which is foreshadowed in the first depends upon a synthesis of the temporal and eternal...The whole is implicite in the first and is present kata krypsin [as hidden],” writes Judge William.\(^{326}\) In falling in love a synthesis of the opposites takes place. First love is “an absolute awakening, an absolute intuiting” that is directed upon a single specific object. First love has a sense of infinitude and apriority in it; yet it is directed upon a finite being that exists in the empirical world. First love is sensual; yet it comes from the depth of the soul and is to that extent spiritual. First love is in the instant, has to a high degree the quality of presence; yet, presupposing itself back into all eternity and forward into all eternity, it has an eternity in itself. First love is a unity of freedom and necessity: the individual feels drawn to the other with an irresistible power, yet in this necessity the individual feels himself free, and in possession of his whole being. First love is a unity of the universal (det Almene) and the singular (det Særegne), it has the universal as the singular. Finally, not only is the individual who is in love absolutely wakeful, he is also in possession of an immense

\(^{326}\) EO2, 41 / SV1 II, 38.
power that makes him eager to meet and overcome opposition.\textsuperscript{327} Having such qualities, falling in love is a wonderful event. Now, if the individuals who fall in love with each other have a religious development, they will understand all that happens to them in the light of their religious life-view. They will refer everything to God. Since love is a good thing, a wonderful thing, they thank God for the gift of love. At the same time this thanksgiving means sanctification of love: when one receives a valuable gift from someone and is grateful for it, one will spontaneously try to take care of the thing given in a manner worthy of the benefactor. Thus, without any further reflection, a good intention, “which also is a kind of first love,” becomes attached to the thanksgiving. Thereby love becomes transformed: while immediately secure in itself, it is drawn up into the ethical.\textsuperscript{328}

For Judge William it is important that the fright for a possible change has no role in this transformation of love. Marriage is not beautiful, nor harmonious and free, if it is just an institution erected by the apprehensive reflection to suppress the wild and unpredictable nature. But that is not the case if the individuals are truly religious and have ethical courage. In such cases the wedding ceremony follows without any calculation and constraint from their falling in love as an unforced religious expression and confirmation of their love: the marriage ceremony just lets what was already in motion proceed freely and openly under the eyes of God and the congregation. What is already taking place is brought before the congregation so that it becomes clear to everyone that these two people, knowing themselves to be burdened by hereditary sin, love each other, want to keep hold of their love, and humbly ask blessing from God for their union.\textsuperscript{329} Thus, the judge assures A, marriage is not an ugly institution based on timid calcu-

\textsuperscript{327} EO2, 42–46 and 60 / SV1 II, 39–43 and 55.
\textsuperscript{328} EO2, 47–48 / SV1 II, 43–44.
\textsuperscript{329} EO2, 52–56 and 88–94 / SV1 II, 48–52 and 81–86.
lation that wants to suppress love and sensuality. Quite the contrary, it is a genuine expression of first love that is free from petty reflection and that has the courage to believe in the victory of the eternal despite human sinfulness. Or at least it ought to be. Everything depends on whether or not the individuals bring the appropriate ethical spirit to the institution. Marriage should resonate with the harmony of the different spheres—the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. But if it does not, “it is not God’s fault, or Christianity’s fault, not of the wedding ceremony, not of the malediction, not of the benediction, but solely of the people themselves.”

According to Judge William, marriage is beautiful in so far as it has its *teleology in itself*. To the same extent it is ethical. For marriage there should be only its own “why” and this “why” is infinite. Far from making marriage moral, commonsense reflection makes it immoral. What saves marriage from common sense is the religious element that sanctifies love and brings reflection into silence: the religious devotion that the individuals have for the unique phenomenon of first love. Marriage should be entered into for the sake of love and religious devotion only, not for the sake of some goods that the individuals want to reach through marriage. Apart from this, however, it is true that marriage contains many goods, hides in itself a multitude of “whys” that life reveals in all its blessedness: according to Judge William, marriage is a school of ethical character, children are a blessing, and at home one’s life has meaning for others.

Whereas first love cannot change without ceasing to be first love, marital love may go through changes and become richer and deeper. Judge William writes: “First love remains an unreal *an-sich* that never acquires inner substance because it moves only in an

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external medium. In the ethical and religious intention, marital love has the possibility of an inner history and is as different from first love as the historical is from the unhistorical.” Judge William seems to understand this inner history on the model of German Idealism as a dialectical process in which the subject develops towards perfection through overcoming its adversities.\textsuperscript{332} The possibility of inner history lies in the ethical-religious intention in which “attentiveness [is] directed to the surrounding world but the will is directed toward itself, toward the inner world.”\textsuperscript{333} It is by virtue of this intention that marital love develops itself with the help of adversities. The movement goes from the internal to the external and back, and in it the external is assimilated in the internal.\textsuperscript{334}

According to Judge William, the essential characteristics of marriage are, on the one hand, love (Kjærligheden) and erotic love (Elskoven), and on the other, the ethical and religious element.\textsuperscript{335} While love must come first, it is the ethical and religious intention (Forsæt) that enables love to develop and grow amidst the troubles

\textsuperscript{332} Like the German Idealists, Judge William expects that in history there is progress. He considers it as a difficulty in first love that it cannot make any progress (EO2, 58 / SV1 II, 53) and he considers it as a fatal problem in romantic love that it remains “abstract in itself” and cannot gain an inner history (EO2, 138 / SV1 II, 125). Judge William also seems to think that there is a certain law-abiding dialectic that binds this progress. He writes that “in the intention marriage has, the law of motion is implicit, the possibility of an inner history (EO2, 61 / SV1 II, 55).” However, the judge is probably referring here to the law that is expressed in the marriage vow: the bride and the groom declare that they also intend to hold on to love in bad days (EO2, 94 / SV1 II, 86). Thus, it is the logical necessity of a Hegelian development of the concept, but the free ethical intention of human individuals that binds the married couple to overcome their adversities.

\textsuperscript{333} EO2, 94 / SV1 II, 86.


\textsuperscript{335} EO2, 32–36 / SV1 II, 30–34.
and adversities of actual life.\textsuperscript{336} Without ethical and religious intention, love remains addicted to those beautiful moments in which life changes into a dream. The first love that lacks such intention remains abstract: it longs for the beautiful moments and cannot turn to the concrete historical actuality. In consequence, it comes into contradiction with the real world and has to take flight from society.\textsuperscript{337} As opposed to marital love, which is invigorated by ethical and religious intention. In that marital love is based on religious and ethical resignation, its eternity is grounded “on the eternal itself.”\textsuperscript{338} Since the individuals have referred their love back to God, they have faith in loves permanent meaning in the existence [\textit{Tilværelse}] sustained by God. Judge William writes:

> What power there is in the marital “mine,” for will, resolution, intention, have a far deeper tone; what energy and suppleness, for what is as hard as will, and what so soft. What power of movement there is...for marriage is instituted in heaven, and duty penetrates the whole body of existence [\textit{Tilværelse}] to the uttermost extremity and prepares the way and gives the assurance that in all eternity no obstacle will be able to disturb love!\textsuperscript{339}

Backed up by ethical intention and religious life-view, marital love “has apriority in itself” and in its apriority it is victorious over all that opposes it in life.\textsuperscript{340} The struggle takes place in the present moment but it is backed up with an apriori faith in its victory. The judge writes that marriage is “that immediacy which contains mediacy, that infinity which contains finitude, that eternity which contains temporality.” The struggle for the eternal in the everyday

\textsuperscript{336} EO2, 47, 58–59, 61, and 94–98 / SV1 II, 44, 53–54, 56, and 86–90.
\textsuperscript{337} EO2, 96–97 and 104 / SV1 II, 88–89 and 95.
\textsuperscript{338} EO2, 36, 58, and 61 / SV1 II, 33, 53, and 55.
\textsuperscript{339} EO2, 58–59 / SV1 II, 54. (Translation slightly altered.)
\textsuperscript{340} EO2, 98 / SV1 II, 90.
life of marriage is a struggle that in itself has victory. Concerning the outer difficulties that marriage may have to face, Judge William writes:

In my marriage, I admittedly have not experienced many adversities of that kind...and therefore I cannot speak from experience, but I nevertheless have the conviction that nothing is able to crush the aesthetic in a human being...And when we read in the Bible about the many gifts of grace, I would actually count this among them—the cheerful boldness, the trust, the belief in actuality and in the eternal necessity whereby the beautiful triumphs, and in the blessedness implicit in the freedom with which the individual offers God his assistance.

Trusting that God takes care of that part of actuality that is not in its control, marital love takes care of its own: “In the religious, it lets God, so to speak, take care of the whole world; in the intention, it will fight together with God for itself, will gain itself in patience.”

Already when ethical intention joins love, consciousness of the adversities that love may have to face comes with it. The individuals become aware that love is just one force in their lives, and that there are other forces and elements that may not be in harmony with it. Marital love has to struggle with these forces and appropriate those elements. However, this it does certain of its victory. Judge William writes:

In the intention, an other [en Ander] is posited, but at the same time this other is also posited as overcome; in the intention this other is posited as an internal other, inasmuch as even the external is seen in its reflection in the inner life. The historical consists in that this other comes forth and acquires its validity, but precisely in its validity.

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341 EO2, 94–95 / SV1 II, 86–87.
342 EO2, 122–123 / SV1 II, 111–112.
343 EO2, 97 / SV1 II, 88–89.
is seen as something, which shall not have validity, so that love, tested
and purified, issues from this movement and assimilates the experi-
ence.\footnote{EO2, 98 / SVI II, 90. (Translation slightly altered.)}

Thus the other of marital love consists both of the outer and the
inner difficulties that come to threat or hinder marital love on its
way.\footnote{EO2, 121 / SVI II, 110.} Judge William writes, on the one hand, about such outer
trials as poverty and illnesses.\footnote{EO2, 121–125 / SVI II, 110–114.} On the other hand, he writes
about sinfulness\footnote{EO2, 97 / SVI II, 89.} and about the monotonous recurring that love
has to live with.\footnote{EO2, 125–145 / SVI II, 114–131.} However, in encountering them, all these trials
are posited as internal in the ethical-religious consciousness.\footnote{EO2, 61, 98, and 123–124 / SVI II, 56, 90, and 112.}
Through this ethical-religious assimilation marital love overcomes
its other and develops.

The process of assimilation that the judge envisions consists
first of all of overcoming the outer trials that having a family im-
plies. If one wishes to preserve the aesthetic in the face of them,
the thing to do is to transform the outer into the inner.\footnote{EO2, 123–124 / SVI II, 112.} The
judge claims that

The married man who has enough memory for his love and courage
in the time of need to say, “The primary question is not one of where
I am going to find the money…but...whether I have kept a pure and
faithful covenant of love with her to whom I am united”...—that
person has triumphed; he has preserved the esthetic in his marriage,
even if he did not have three small rooms in which to live.\footnote{EO2, 124 / SVI II, 113.}
Chapter 3: Either/Or

According to Judge William, “the person who has the courage to transform the outer trial into an inner trial has already virtually surmounted it, since by faith transubstantiation takes place even in the moment of suffering.” But does this transubstantiation also produce bread for the wife and children? Concerning this problem, the judge refers to Luther:

There are occasions in life when it is a mark of something great and good in a person that he is as if mad, that he has not separated the world of poetry and the world of actuality but sees the latter sub specie pœseos [from the poetical point of view]. Luther says somewhere in one of his sermons, where he speaks of poverty and need: One has never heard of a Christian dying of hunger.

In the divine Lutheran madness, then, the judge maintains that “the poor, if they truly possess the religious, also have the esthetic, while the rich, insofar as they do not have the religious, do not have the esthetic either.” The task is to hold on to the positive that one possesses in inwardness, while one lives in the external world. Judge William’s conviction is that if only love can be preserved, then the aesthetic, too, can be preserved, for love itself is the aesthetic.

But, besides outer trials, love has also inner trials. Most notably, love must struggle with time, i.e. endure the duration of time. In the eyes of the aesthete A, only that time is beautiful when one experiences something for the first time; “the very first intimation of love, the first glimpse and the first disappearance of the beloved object, the first chord of this voice, the first glance, the first hand-

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352 Ibid.
353 EO2, 123 / SVI II, 112. The reference is probably to Luther’s “Sermon on the Seventh Sunday after Trinity (Mark 8:1–9).” See, En christelig Postille sammendragen af Dr. Marten Luthers Kirke- og Hauspostiller, vol. 1–2, Copenhagen: 1828 (ASKB 283); vol. 1, 441.
354 EO2, 124 / SVI II, 113.
355 EO2, 125 / SVI II, 114.
shake, the first kiss—right up to the first perfect assurance of its possession.” But what follows after has less aesthetic value, “the unavoidable habit, this dreadful monotony, the everlasting Einerlei [sameness] in the alarming still life of marital domesticity.” Judge William’s retort is that the recurring that characterizes all life, and therefore love also, can be very beautiful, too, just as the uniform tempo may be very beautiful and have a great effect in music. To live in time is the lot of human individuals, but it can be seen also as a blessing: one may take it as an opportunity for acquiring in truth what one possesses. Conquering might be a great art, but possessing (Besiddelse) is even greater—for example, the art of the king, who guides his countries with wisdom to what is best for them, is far greater than the art of the conqueror, who subjugates countries. The inner history is the history of truly appropriating the possession. Judge William maintains that this is the only true history, since it struggles with the life principle of history, with time, and “when one struggles with time, the temporal and every single little moment thereby has its great reality.” In the ethical life-view of Judge William, the “everlasting Einerlei” in the still life of marital domesticity, thus, seems to play the same role as the recurring devotional practices in medieval monastic life: it forms a context for spiritual development. In his everyday marital life the married man is able to draw nearer to the eternal.

But at the same time marriage provides a way to live poetically. According to Judge William, the married man, who combines the eternal and the temporal in his life, is the one who is “truly living poetically.” However, he admits that the beauty of this life can-

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357 EO2, 125 / SV1 II, 114.
360 EO2, 134 / SV1 II, 121–122.
361 EO2, 137–138 / SV1 II, 125.
not be represented in art. The aesthetic representation in art always requires a concentration in the moment (*Moment*). Art and poetry "shorten the way for us," and "concentrate the extensive in the intensive." According to Judge William, outer history and the qualities essential to it can be concentrated without any damage. For example, one does not have to recount all the adversities that a knight has to face on his way to win the beautiful princess in order to represent his romantic love and knightly courage: one slain boar more or less makes no essential difference, if one wants to portray these qualities. But, according to Judge William, inner history and the qualities that are essential to it cannot be concentrated in this way. The reason for this is that here the protraction of time and the struggle with time is essential. Thus, it is impossible to describe in art the ideal husband, who is that every day, or the cross-bearer, who takes up his cross every day, or the patience that contends against time and is long-suffering.

All the same Judge William claims that through marriage the individual is able to reach the highest of the aesthetic. Following Schelling’s theory of art, the judge claims that development in art has been from spatial categories to temporal categories, “detaching itself more and more from space and aiming toward time.” The development has gone from sculpture, which depicts repose, to poetry, which depicts motions and affirms the meaning of time. But even poetry has its limitations in portraying “that of which the truth is precisely the temporal sequence.” However, there is a way to represent aesthetically the beauty that pertains to life, namely, the ethical-religious life. The judge writes:

Everything I am talking about here certainly can be portrayed aesthetically, but not in poetic reproduction, but by living it, by realiz-

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362 *EO2*, 133 / *SV1* II, 120–121.
ing it in the life of actuality. In this way the esthetic elevates itself and reconciles itself with life, for just as poetry and art in one sense are precisely a reconciliation with life, yet in another sense they are enmity to life, because they reconcile only one side of the soul. Here I am at the summit of the esthetic. And in truth, he who has humility and courage enough to let himself be esthetically transformed, he who feels himself present as a character in a drama the deity is writing, in which the poet and the prompter are not different persons, in which the individual, as the experienced actor who has lived into his character and his lines is not disturbed by the prompter but feels that he himself wants to say what is being whispered to him, so that it almost becomes a question whether he is putting the words in the prompter’s mouth or the prompter in his, he who in the most profound sense feels himself creating and created...he and he alone has brought into actual existence the highest of the esthetic.  

We are here at the heart of the ethical-religious way of living poetically and the passage above could be called its credo. A person, who is ethical and religious, reaches the highest of the aesthetic by realizing the aesthetic in actual life. In his dissertation, Kierkegaard had written about “letting oneself to be composed poetically.” Similarly, Judge William writes here about letting oneself be transformed esthetically by becoming a character in a drama written by the deity (Guddommen). Here the aesthetic is reconciled with life in a religious framework and through ethical striving. Although the beauty of an ethical-religious life cannot be portrayed in art, it can still be experienced by a person who lives this life. Judge William testifies to this by comparing his marriage with a little running stream: “So it is with the domestic life of marriage—quiet, modest, humming. It does not have many changes, and yet it is like that water, running, and yet, like that wa-

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365 EO2, 137 / SVI II, 124–125.
ter, it has melody, dear to the one who knows it, dear to him precisely because he knows it.\footnote{366}

But where is there progress in this stream? The answer seems to be: in the inwardness of the ones that partake in it with hope and recollection. Judge William writes that for an individual who lives simultaneously in hope and recollection “marital love is not just a simple progression in which the original is preserved but is a growing progression in which the original is increased.” The present time is a unity of hope and recollection: recollection “places a sharp on the note of the moment,” that is, elevates the experience to an ever higher level; hope of eternity, on the other hand, hovers over every moment and “fills out the moment.”\footnote{367} As life goes on and eternity comes closer, recollection gets richer and hope stronger—for an ethical-religious person, that is, not for someone like the aesthete A, who wastes his life in aesthetic experiments and who believes that life eventually ends in perdition.\footnote{368}

The love of the aesthete cannot produce a true history in which there is purpose and development. Neither can it form the basis for a true communion in which there is mutual recognition. The aesthete is in love with appearances, not with the spirit behind them. Therefore he cannot see his beloved as she really is and he has to make a mystery of himself, for he believes that once the fascinating mystery is gone, love will cease.\footnote{369} In contrast, the ethical person thinks that only when the mystery is gone, love begins: only when one knows what one loves, does one truly love.\footnote{370} On the other hand, he does not want to be mistaken for the other: he wants her to love him as he is. Thus, in true marital love the individuals want to open themselves to each other, give themselves to

\footnote{366} EO2, 144 / SV1 II, 130.
\footnote{367} EO2, 142–143 / SV1 II, 128–129.
\footnote{368} Cf. EO2, 13–17 / SV1 II, 13–16.
each other even to the extent that they lose themselves in each other. 371 “Honesty, openheartedness, revelation [Aabenbarelse], understanding—this is the life-principle of marriage,” writes the judge. 372 While the romantic love that the aesthete worships can hardly endure such openness, it is a necessary prerequisite of marriage. 373

Above we have investigated how the individual becomes ethically situated in the world through passion, imagination, and will in Judge William’s first letter. The passion of love situates the individual anew, if interpreted in the light of religious imagination and confirmed by ethical will. In this process the individual must be both passive and active. While he is passive with regard to being seized by love, he is active in that he sees the love in a religious light and reacts to it with ethical intention. Only if he does that does love situate him in the actual world. Love that lacks the ethical and religious elements cannot survive actuality. To cherish love the romantic lovers have to escape the world. However, if the individuals are ethical and religious, they have no need to escape the actual world into dream worlds, claims the judge. They will be able to face the everyday life, meet its adversities, overcome them, and gain a history. By virtue of the ethical will and religious belief it is, thus, possible for them to live poetically in the given historical actuality.

The ethical-religious individuals that Judge William describes in his first letter trust that Governance takes care of that part of historical actuality that is not in his power. This religious view makes up the context of their ethical striving. The ideal is that the individuals become characters in a drama written by the deity. Thus, the ethical striving does not take place in a solipsistic inwardness of the subject, but in actuality considered from the reli-

372 EO2, 116 / SV1 II, 106. (Translation slightly altered.)
Chapter 3: Either/Or

The married man and woman develop through the love in the world. The former they consider a gift from God, the latter as created and governed by God.

To conclude, the description of marital life in Judge William’s first letter corresponds well with the ethical-religious ideal of living poetically presented in *The Concept of Irony*. According to this ideal, living poetically means “the artistic earnestness that comes to the aid of the divine in man,” so that “the whole individuality may develop harmoniously into a pliable form rounded off in itself.” It means that the individual “lets himself be poetically composed” in “a definite given context into which he has to fit,” so that he “does not become a word without meaning.”

3.1.2 Choice, Repentance, and the Universal

In his first letter Judge William tries to persuade the aesthete A of the beauty of the ethical-religious life in general and marriage in particular. In his second letter he tackles the problem of A, who has lost his life in the endless reflection of possibilities. How may such an aesthete regain his life? By moving from the aesthetic way of life to the ethical? But how does he do that? The judge demonstrates.

In order to clarify the position of his young friend, Judge William begins with an analysis of the *aesthetic way of life* and of the *aesthetic life-view*. “The esthetic in a person is that by which he spontaneously and immediately is what he is,” defines the judge. The person that lives aesthetically lives “in and by and from and for the esthetic that is in him.” He “is always living in the moment, yet is always cognizant of it only in a certain relativity.” Therefore he is not really conscious of himself and his life; he lacks transpar-

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374 CI, 280 / SIV XIII, 352. (Translation slightly modified.)
375 CI, 283 / SIV XIII, 354.
However, according to Judge William, even the person who lives aesthetically has a view of life, a conception of life’s meaning and purpose. The heart of the aesthetic life-view is: *One must enjoy life.*

When a person who lives aesthetically says that he wants to enjoy life, he always posits a *condition*, which may lie either outside him or within him. What one views as the necessary condition for enjoying life can be various and, accordingly, there are many different forms of aesthetic life-view. As such a condition the person may consider some specific object or quality, such as health, beauty, wealth, honor, noble birth, or the beloved. Or he may regard developing his talents as the condition for enjoying life. A more reflective person regards fulfilling his desires—whatever they may be—as the general condition for enjoying life; but, if he reflects a little further, he realizes that this cannot be done. Thus, he may end up in Epicureanism, which prudently cultivates enjoyment, or even in Cynicism, which finds enjoyment in constantly discarding the immediate conditions of enjoyment.

The common denominator for these life-views is that having meaning in life depends on the presence of some immediate condition. If the condition is lacking, the person *despairs*. According to Judge William this signifies that essentially his life has been despair all the time. Hence, every aesthetic view of life is despair and everyone, who lives aesthetically, is in despair, whether he knows it or not. In other words, if one becomes desperate when a transient condition for enjoying life disappears, this means that one has bound oneself to the temporal. But, having the meaning of one’s

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377 EO2, 179 / SV1 II, 163.
life in something, whose nature it is to disappear, means that fundamentally one is living in despair.  

The view of a human being that is here in the background is the one that could already be discerned in Kierkegaard’s dissertation and in the first letter of Judge William: a human being is a spirit, a self, existing between the eternal and the temporal, between the infinite and the finite. As a spirit, a human being is in relation to both of the poles of his existence. However, a person, who lives aesthetically, lives in immediacy; in him the spirit is still asleep. His personality is determined, not yet as a self-conscious spirit, but immediately through its capacities, its inclinations, its drives, its passions, by its specific social milieu and specific environment, by its history. He lives constantly in the moment, is conscious only in terms of certain relativity and within certain bounds. The infinite and the eternal have no decisive meaning in his life.

Now, A, the ironic young man to whom Judge William writes, is quite conscious of the transitoriness of the temporal and the vanity of life. He is a stranger and alien in the world. There is no substance, no fundamental meaning in his life. As an observer, he hovers above life and above himself always ready with a new interpretation. A’s conviction is that whatever one decides to do in life, one will regret it afterwards. He is totally intoxicated by the absurdity of life, in its “higher madness.” As a bright, cultivated

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381 EO2, 180 / SV1 II, 163.
382 EO2, 251 / SV1 II, 225.
383 EO2, 216 / SV1 II, 193.
384 EO2, 179 / SV1 II, 162.
385 EO2, 194 / SV1 II, 175.
386 EO2, 83 / SV1 II, 76.
387 EO2, 7–8 and 11 / SV1 II, 7–8 and 11.
388 EO2, 158–159 / SV1 II, 144–145.
person, A is able to make interesting contacts in life and appear as an interesting person. But while he sees no deeper meaning in life, he will not get involved in it in earnest. For him life is a masquerade. Like a chameleon he exists only in relation to others. In accidental contacts with people he is sovereign, but essentially he is nothing. He is already finished with the world both in theoretical and aesthetic respects.\textsuperscript{389} He has namely no faith in something essential that would be hiding behind the shadow play of temporality. Accordingly, he has no respect for what is established by divine or human law and no place in the world, which would be his and where he could concentrate his activity. He lives in a capricious, arbitrary way.\textsuperscript{390}

Now, the diagnosis of Judge William is that A has seen through the aesthetic way of life, but still has an aesthetic life-view and for that reason sees life as desperate: he has realized the nothingness of the aesthetic; his life-view is despair itself.\textsuperscript{391} The judge recognizes in him a need for the eternal and interprets his unreliability, his faithlessness towards other people, as expressing a striving for the infinite.\textsuperscript{392} But evidently this striving is of a one-sided, aesthetic-intellectual character and lacks true earnestness.\textsuperscript{393} A makes no resolute attempt to change his life, to take possession of himself—his personality remains in its immediacy.\textsuperscript{394} Somewhat surprisingly, what the judge recommends to A is that he should despair in earnest: he should choose despair. The judge characterizes this as an action requiring all the soul’s strength and self-command.\textsuperscript{395} According to the judge, in despairing this way, in choosing despair,

\textsuperscript{389} EO2, 159 and 195–202 / \textit{SV} I II, 145 and 176–182.
\textsuperscript{390} EO2, 11–17 / \textit{SV} I II, 11–16.
\textsuperscript{391} EO2, 193–196 / \textit{SV} I II, 175–177.
\textsuperscript{392} EO2, 202–205 and 326 / \textit{SV} I II, 182–185 and 292–293.
\textsuperscript{393} EO2, 16–17 and 166–167 / \textit{SV} I II, 15–16 and 151–152.
\textsuperscript{394} EO2, 194 / \textit{SV} I II, 175.
\textsuperscript{395} EO2, 207–211 / \textit{SV} I II, 186–189.
the individual chooses again, he chooses *himself in his eternal validity.*

The choice contains a definite dialectic. There are in fact two moments already involved in the choice here. Judge William says that when the person chooses despair he chooses again, he chooses himself, not in his immediacy, but in his eternal validity. In other words, he “links himself to an eternal power for an eternity,” and “accepts himself as the one whose remembrance time will never erase.” In choosing himself in his eternal validity the person chooses himself at the same time as *the absolute.* The judge writes: “When I choose absolutely, I choose despair, and in despair I choose the absolute, for I myself am the absolute; I posit the absolute, and I myself am the absolute.”

It appears that despairing plays here the same role in one’s personal life as Cartesian doubt does in philosophical thinking. The judge maintains that it is the way to find the absolute, the eternal human being, the universal. However, whereas Cartesian doubt lays bare the thinking self as the spiritual substance, the self disclosed by despair is, according to Judge William, “the most abstract of all, and yet in itself it is also the most concrete of all—it is *freedom.*”

The judge also gives another description of the double movement involved in this first phase of the ethical choice. He writes that first there is despair, but this is immediately followed by “choosing to *will*” or “the baptism of the will.” If we connect this to the other description, the point here is not just the activa-
tion of willing *tou court*, but the awakening of the will that is qualified by the eternal. So far A has despaired in thought only, that is, he has become conscious of the vanity and transitoriness of the aesthetic. Now he should recognize despair as his own position and despair over that in earnest. If he does this, his will to base his life on the eternal arises, and in his despair he chooses himself as the absolute. In other words, he chooses himself as this *self*, which is both eternal and temporal, both infinite and finite. According to Judge William, every person has a self. One could envy traits of other persons, but could one seriously wish to lose all of one’s identity and to be someone else? William’s answer is negative, and according to him this shows that human beings are themselves out of their free will and have a sense of the eternal validity of their personality.

Thus, when a person chooses himself in an absolute sense, the self chosen is not something finite along with other finite things. Due to this, the individual may take a wrong path, notes Judge William. The first form the choice takes is complete isolation: the individual separates himself from his relations to the world until in this separation he ends in an abstract identity. The wrong path that the individual may take is to stick to this abstract identity and to isolation as, according to Judge William, Greek philosophers and later Christian anchorites and mystics did. The judge has little sympathy for such escape from human situatedness. The falsity in such a life lies in its *abstractness*. As the judge sees it, the mystic rejects the existence, the actuality, in which God has placed him, and “thereby actually rejects God’s love or demands another expression for it than that which God wills to give.” Moreover, the life of the mystic is “a deception of the world in which he lives, a deception of the persons to whom he is bound or with whom he

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405 Ibid.
could establish a relationship.\footnote{EO2, 243–244 / SV1 II, 218–219.} The mystic’s error is that “in the choice he does not become concrete either to himself or to God; he chooses himself abstractly.”\footnote{EO2, 248 / SV1 II, 222.}

However, if the individual has the right attitude, what he chooses is not an abstraction, but \textit{infinitely concrete}. There is nothing arbitrary in the choice of oneself; a person does not create himself, he chooses himself.\footnote{EO2, 215 / SV1 II, 193.} “He has his place in the world: in freedom he himself chooses his place—that is, he chooses this place. He is a specific individual; in the choice he makes himself into a specific individual: namely, into the same one, because he chooses himself,” explains Judge William.\footnote{EO2, 251 / SV1 II, 225.} When a person truly chooses himself it turns out to be his whole aesthetic self in its rich concretion, with its multitude of determinate characteristics that he chooses. But in the ethical choice the person appropriates this self in front of the eternal power and in respect of freedom, i.e. he chooses his self absolutely, as a synthesis, and that is why it becomes absolutely different from his former self: his finite and temporal personality is now made infinite and eternal.\footnote{EO2, 177, 215, 222–223, and 250–251 / SV1 II, 160, 193, 199–200, and 225.}

But there is still more involved in the ethical choice of oneself. Judge William notes that as temporal beings we are essentially affected by what takes place in time. We carry our past within us and are influenced by it. That is why making the choice is so urgent: time is passing and the later one makes the choice, the more there is to retract.\footnote{EO2, 163–165 / SV1 II, 148–150.} In the choice of oneself the person discovers next that he has a \textit{history} “in which he acknowledges identity with himself.” The judge writes: “This history is of a different sort, for

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\footnote{EO2, 243–244 / SV1 II, 218–219.}
\footnote{EO2, 248 / SV1 II, 222.}
\footnote{EO2, 215 / SV1 II, 193.}
\footnote{EO2, 251 / SV1 II, 225.}
\footnote{EO2, 177, 215, 222–223, and 250–251 / SV1 II, 160, 193, 199–200, and 225.}
\footnote{EO2, 163–165 / SV1 II, 148–150.}
in this history he stands in relation to other individuals of the race and to the whole race.” What is this history “of a different sort”? What seems to be at stake is history seen from the inside, seen from the point of view of freedom, and comprehended personally, as one’s own. The judge apparently distinguishes this history at least from history as understood by Hegelian philosophy. Since Judge William refers earlier in his letter to the Hegelian view of history, he probably has it in his mind now as he writes about this history “of a different sort.” In this history, as in Hegelian history, the person “acknowledges identity” with himself. But, whereas in Hegelian philosophy history is understood from the point of view of the totality and, therefore, as necessary, here history is understood from the point of view of a free subject, who tries to come to the level of his personal being. What the person comprehends from this point of view is the life of free human spirits, which he can understand all too well since he is himself participating in it—all too well, because there are “painful things” in it. The painfulness could be due to the fact that it is not a history of free human spirits after all that comes into view: he and the others do not act in this history as he would wish them to act. Yet, writes Judge William, “he is the person he is only through this history” and, since he wants to become himself, he will appropriate it. Under these circumstances, then, the appropriation takes the form of *repentance* (Anger): the individual “repents himself back into himself, back into the family, back into the race, until he finds himself in God.”

According to the judge, what directs us to repent is freedom. It is only through repenting that we human beings may come to the
level of our own historical existence and become free. However, our life does not begin in nothing, but is inseparably bound with that of the human race. Therefore, freedom would remain a dream, if we could not repent the past of our race.\footnote{EO2, 231–239 / SV1 II, 207–215, especially 239 / 214–215.} From the point of view of freedom, it would be faintheartedness not to want to repent for the sins of the fathers, writes the judge.\footnote{EO2, 218 / SV1 II, 196.} He claims that here philosophy lacks ethical courage: it is too aesthetic; it wants to see everything as necessary. This is why, according to the judge, one feels helped by the Christian view, which assigns everything to sin, that is, to freedom, but not by the wisdom of the philosophers.\footnote{EO2, 239–240 / SV1 II, 215.} Wisdom is judicious, it says: “Man is a frail being and it would be absurd of God to ask the impossible from him.” With such reasoning, however, the movement of repentance is checked and the project of freedom becomes entangled in evaluations of the extent of reasonable human responsibility. But since in the end one does not know how much it is that a man can do, the result is disquietude.\footnote{EO2, 344–346 / SV1 II, 310–311.} It is otherwise with Christianity, claims the judge. Here \textit{love} makes the individual repent absolutely. Repentance is the expression for the love with which man loves God.\footnote{EO2, 216 / SV1 II, 194.} Such repentance is in harmony with human freedom, for “when you are in love, you are in freedom.”\footnote{EO2, 349 / SV1 II, 314} Now the reasoning will set no limits for repentance and the individual is opened up. The isolation which choosing oneself absolutely at first meant is cancelled, and in repentance the individual comes into the most absolute continuity with the finite world.\footnote{EO2, 249 / SV1 II, 223.} Thus, while repentance takes the
individual out of the whole existence, it also takes him back and unites him with it, with the life of the race.\textsuperscript{425}

According to Judge William, repentance does not make a person dull and inactive, as one might think. In repentance the individual does not namely see himself under the category of necessity, but under the category of freedom. He has chosen himself in freedom, and through repentance he ransoms himself in order to remain in his freedom.\textsuperscript{426} Thus, repentance does not mean sinking into fatalistic sorrow and apathy. Such would be “mutiny against God” and “treason against human race.” Instead, repentance is an ethical expression for the sorrow over sin, and as such it is an action that aims at regaining freedom.\textsuperscript{427}

After the individual has chosen himself as free and repentantly taken absolute responsibility for his life, there next appears an absolute difference, the difference between \textit{good} and \textit{evil}. This distinction exists only for free will: according to Judge William, the good exists only by virtue of my willing it, otherwise it does not exist at all—it is a being-in-and-for-itself that is posited by a being-in-and-for-itself, that is, by freedom. Similarly with the evil. So long as one has not chosen oneself absolutely, the absolute difference between good and evil remains latent only.\textsuperscript{428}

The ethical choice means a transformation of the life and the life-view of the individual. The aesthetic life and life-view become replaced by the ethical. Whereas every aesthetic view was at bottom despair, in that it was built upon that which can both be and not be, the ethical life-view builds life upon that which has being as its essential quality.\textsuperscript{429} What could this be in Judge William’s view? In the first place, it appears to be the good. But the good is

\textsuperscript{425} EO2, 248–251 / SVI II, 223–225.
\textsuperscript{426} EO2, 232 / SVI II, 208.
\textsuperscript{427} EO2, 236–239 / SVI II, 212–215.
\textsuperscript{428} EO2, 223–224 / SVI II, 200–201.
\textsuperscript{429} EO2, 225 / SVI II, 201.
posited by freedom, that is, by the self, and the self is appropriated only in repentance, in which the individual repents himself back “until he finds himself in God.” Thus, “that which has being as its essential quality” must on the fundamental level be God and his will, such as it manifests itself for faith in the universal purposefulness of the existence. In accordance with this assumption, the judge writes about “the eternal power that omnipresently pervades all existence [Tilværelse],”\(^{430}\) about God “who rules the world,”\(^{431}\) and about “a rational order of things in which every human being, if he so wills, fills his place.”\(^{432}\)

The ethical choice is laid out above as an act of human spirit, which consists of a sequence of distinct movements (despair, choice of the self as the absolute, choice of the self as concrete, repentance, choice of the good), and this is also how Judge William presents it.\(^{433}\) On the other hand, he writes also about the moment of choice (Valgets Øieblik).\(^{434}\) The moment of choice refers to the decisive turning point in the life of the subject: “[T]o become conscious in one’s eternal validity is a moment that is more significant than everything else in the world.”\(^{435}\) The unforgettable moment of choice does not mean, however, that the life of the individual would now be fixed. Rather, the moment of choice corresponds in the life of the individual to the wedding ceremony in the life of lovers. Like the wedding, it is just the beginning of the story.\(^{436}\)

\(^{430}\) EO2, 167 / SV1 II, 152.
\(^{431}\) EO2, 236 / SV1 II, 212.
\(^{432}\) EO2, 292 / SV1 II, 262.
\(^{433}\) EO2, 208–224 / SV1 II, 187–201.
\(^{434}\) EO2, 177 / SV1 II, 160.
\(^{435}\) EO2, 206 / SV1 II, 185.
\(^{436}\) Judge William himself refers to this parallelism: “The historical character of marriage makes this understanding something that is all at once just as much as it continually becomes. It is the same here as in individual life. When a person has arrived at an understanding of himself, has had the courage to be willing to
The individual chooses himself as free and knows himself now in respect to his freedom. In other words, he knows what he should be capable of becoming. But such knowledge in itself points towards the future. The judge writes:

When the individual knows himself, he is not finished; but this knowing is very productive, and from this knowledge emerges the authentic individual... Through the individual’s intercourse with himself the individual is made pregnant by himself and gives birth to himself. The self that the individual knows is simultaneously the actual self and the ideal self, which the individual has outside himself as the image in whose likeness he is to form himself, and which on the other hand he has within himself, since it is he himself.  

Having chosen himself as free and knowing what he should be, the individual now truly tries to become the self he should be. Thus, as in the case of wedding, where the marital life that lies ahead means a development, here, too, ahead there is a life that means a development: there is a dialectical movement that aims at the self-identity of the subject, i.e. at the identity of his actual self and ideal self.

In this new life making choices becomes essentially different from what it was when the individual was living aesthetically. According to Judge William, an aesthetic choice is not a real choice. It is either altogether immediate or it loses itself in multiplicity. Without feeling personal responsibility for one’s choices and their

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337 EO2, 258–259 / SV1 II, 232.
consequences, the aesthete chooses only for the moment and may choose the opposite the next moment. As the self is not truly present in its choices, the personality is not consolidated through them but withers away in atrophy. In contrast to this, the person who lives ethically is present in his choices as himself. He has his concretion as his task, goal, and objective. His choices express his self and through them he reveals himself in the world. In his choices he will try to choose his place rightly, but if he fails, he will not give up. Even if he makes a mistake, he always has something to work with, something to improve—namely, himself.

According to Judge William, the aesthetic is “that in a person whereby he immediately is the person he is,” and an aesthetic development is, like that of a plant, necessary. By contrast, the ethical is “that whereby a person becomes what he becomes,” it is, to interpret, freedom and the good will. In ethical development evil is to be suppressed and the good allowed to come to the fore. In the ethical consciousness of the eternal the individual is raised above the moment and he is “in freedom.” Hence, the ethical individual may choose freely and authentically between the good and evil alternatives, and through his choices he develops. However, since the material for this development is always his given self, there will also be something resembling an organic development in the life of the ethical individual. According to the judge, the movement the individual makes while going towards his goal is the work of freedom, but at the same time of immanent teleology. Moreover, although the aesthetic and the ethical life-view differ clearly from each other, that does not mean that the ethical

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438 EO2, 167 / SVI II, 151.
439 EO2, 163 / SVI II, 148.
440 EO2, 251–252 / SVI II, 226.
442 EO2, 179 / SVI II, 162.
443 EO2, 274 / SVI II, 246.
would want to do away with the aesthetic. Quite the contrary, in
the ethical life that follows the ethical choice the aesthetic returns,
but as transfigured. The aesthetic is excluded as the absolute, but it
returns in its relativity. Now, as the infinite is brought into fini-
tude, the world becomes truly beautiful: when life is regarded ethi-
cally, is seen as striving towards the good, it acquires true beauty.444
Thus, making the ethical choice, taking a serious and responsible
attitude towards life, does not abolish what is genuinely beautiful
in life, but intensifies it.

According to Judge William, the task of the ethical individual
is “to work the accidental and the universal together into a whole”: a
person ought to make himself into a universal human being by
clothing himself in his concretion and by permeating this concre-
tion with the universal. According to Judge William, “to be the
unique human being is not so great in and by itself, for every hu-
man being shares this with every product of nature, but to be that
in such a way that he is thereby also the universal—that is the true
art of living.”445 Not to be something extraordinary, but to realize
the universal (at realisere det Almene) is the task of the ethical in-
dividual. “The genuinely extraordinary person is the genuinely
ordinary person. The more of the universally human an individual
can realize in his life, the more extraordinary a human being he is,”
writes the judge.446

The universal is something which each individual can compre-
prehend in his inwardness, but which cannot be found in its pure
form in the external, in social practices. In them the ethical is al-
ways obscured by the aesthetic element. Therefore the individual
should rather look for the ethical fundament within himself.
Through his reason the individual knows the universal as an ab-

444 EO2, 177 and 271 / SV1 II, 161 and 243.
446 EO2, 328 / SV1 II, 294. (Translation slightly altered.)
versal also in a concrete form. Were it not so, it would be impossible for him to become the universal man, whereas now his individual life can be an individual life and the universal at the same time.\footnote{EO2, 255–256 / SV1 II, 229.} It is to his conscience, then, that the individual ought to defer in order to realize the universally human. One notices how thoroughly Judge William disagrees with Hegel here. Hegel posited ethical forms of life (\textit{Sittlichkeit}) above subjective morality (\textit{Moralität}) where conscience has its home.\footnote{EO2, 254 / SV1 II, 228.} Judge William sticks to the distinction between inner and outer, maintains that collective forms of life (\textit{Bestemmels af Sæder}) are always external to the subject, and argues that one must strive towards the universal with the guidance of conscience that has its seat within every human being.\footnote{EO2, 150–152 / SV1 II, 136–138.}

Accordingly, the relation of the individual to his duty is not external, but internal. Duty is not a multiplicity of particular moral stipulations a person has to hold on to in his life.\footnote{EO2, 255–256 / SV1 II, 229.} Neither is it a sum of appointments he has to keep because of the occupation that he has as a member of society. If the individual truly strives to express himself in the universal, duty is like an organic whole growing out of his character. Since in fulfilling the duty it is not the external performances but the devotion that counts, fundamentally there is no one else who can see to it that the person is fulfilling it except for the person himself.\footnote{EO2, 150–152 / SV1 II, 136–138.} However, this by no means weakens the duty, since the ethical person characteristically assumes absolute responsibility for his duty. It is as though heaven and earth would collapse if he did not fulfill his duty, yet, on the other hand, even if heaven and earth did collapse, this would in no way exempt him from that obligation. External authorities have
no role in this: in experiencing the full intensity of his duty a person becomes conscious of the eternal validity of his personal being. According to Judge William, this is also the true proof of the immortality of the soul.\(^4\)

The eternal in the human soul, therefore, reveals itself in duty. Accordingly, duty also helps the human being to overcome time and to gain a history: duty is an expression for the fact that the way of the ethical life is prepared in eternity. It is no accident that the language duty uses is in the future tense.\(^5\) If love fears, duty calms it by its future tense: “Fear not; you shall [skal] conquer!” Here there is more than just hope: the command carries with it conviction.\(^6\)

According to Judge William, the inwardness of the ethical creates a kinship between individuals. Judge William acknowledges that the inward ethical-religious relation to God does indeed isolate the individual for a moment. But for a sound person this moment (\(Øieblik\)) will not last long, and it increases the inwardness of earthly relationships.\(^7\) The ethical task is namely universal: in conscience everyone is shown the way by which he becomes a universal human being.\(^8\) Thus, the ethical will not make the individual lose contact with his fellow humans. On the contrary, it is by holding on to the ethical that the individual is able to keep the humanity of other individuals in sight in the middle of the vacuous distinctions of finitude. In the light of his own ethical will he sees the struggle, which bringing the universal together with the particular requires, and this struggle he can see in every person’s life. If he has courage to believe that the struggle leads to the victory of the good, he will see the struggle as beautiful. In conse-

\(^4\) EO2, 266–270 / SV1, 239–242.
\(^5\) EO2, 149 / SV1, 135–136.
\(^6\) EO2, 146 / SV1, 133.
\(^7\) EO2, 246–247 / SV1, 221–222.
\(^8\) EO2, 255–256 / SV1, 229–230.
quence, he begins to see the beauty of the lives around him, i.e. he begins to see beauty everywhere.\footnote{EO2, 275–276 / SV1 II, 246–247.}

According to Judge William, with respect to the ethical everyone is essentially in the same situation. The judge claims that it would be superstitious to think that events and life’s situations as such make a person amount to something. He writes:

The person who lives ethically knows that what counts is what one sees in each situation \( i \text{ ethvert Forhold} \), and the energy with which he considers it, and that the one who thus disciplines himself in the most insignificant life situations \( Livsforhold \) can experience more than the one who has been a witness to—indeed, been a participant in—the most noteworthy events. He knows that there is a dancing place everywhere, that even the lowliest of men has his, and that if he himself so wills his dancing can be just as beautiful, just as gracious, just as mimetic, just as dramatic as the dancing of those to whom a place has been assigned in history.\footnote{EO2, 252–253 / SV1 II, 226–227.}

Behind the externality of manifold different customs, the ethical person is able to perceive an ethical will similar to his own. Judge William notices that “it has been pointed out that whereas all civilized nations made it the children’s duty to care for their parents, savages practiced the custom of putting their aged parents to death.”\footnote{EO2, 265 / SV1 II, 237–238.} But, argues the judge, the question remains whether the savages intended to do something evil by this. We may perceive even in this act an expression of care and sympathy, may we not?\footnote{By this the judge does not mean that the habit would be recommendable. He just notes that the question remains, whether these people intended to do evil or good.} In other words, within the strange external, it is still possible to discern the same ethical intention familiar to oneself from oneself. The judge notes that if I approach morals in empirical manner, if I
consider the different customs and beliefs of different times and peoples from outside, I easily come to doubt the existence of the ethical, the universal. However, if I take my personal being as the absolute, the doubt will vanish—for me the absolute difference between good and evil always remains; responsibility and duty likewise. Thus, having his teleology in himself does not mean that the individual would come to doubt the ethical. The doubt concerns the external, not my relation to the universal. The others are in the same situation: even though it is impossible for another man to say what my duty is, it will always be possible for him to say what his duty is.

According to Judge William, every individual is engaged in the affairs of life as a certain specific personality. Thus, the absolute task of the individual is first and foremost to work on himself. But this self is “not only a personal self, but a social, a civic self.” It is not an abstract self, but a concrete self that stands “in a living interaction with these specific surroundings, these life conditions, this order of things.” In his life the individual will, therefore, develop in turns the personal, the civic, and the religious virtues, for these complement each other. That the individual is the absolute and has his teleology within him does not mean that he would be the central thing for himself. On the contrary, since it is a part of his concrete self that he is in relation to other people and the surrounding world, he must open his self to the world he belongs to.

According to the judge, it is every human being’s duty to become open, to reveal himself (at blive aabenbar). Judge William sees the crucial difference between the aesthetic and the ethical in their stance towards openness. Although the aesthete is interested in the external, he shuns openness. However much he gives him-

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462 EO2, 262–263 / SV1 II, 235–236.
self to the world, he never does it totally—there is always something he holds back, and all his revelations are only concealments. In contrast to this, ethics demands the individual reveal himself. According to Judge William, while Scripture teaches that it is appointed to every human being to die and after that to come to judgment, when everything will be revealed, ethics says it is the meaning of life and reality that the person is to be revealed.\(^{463}\)

Revealing oneself, of course, does not mean exposing one’s feelings and thoughts at every possible and impossible occasion in public. It means that one fulfills one’s task as a concrete human being and thereby reveals what one is made of. For the typical aesthete, life is worth living if one has enough money to make it enjoyable. The ethical person understands that doing work in order to live belongs to human life and he sees the beauty in work.\(^ {464}\) In the case of the aesthete, if he works, then his work must have some extraordinary glamour in it. It must give him an opportunity to use and develop some aristocratic talent of his that distinguishes him from the crowd; otherwise there is no aesthetic fascination in the work. The ethical person is not picky in choosing his work, but considers his work as his calling. For him it is enough that he is able to carry out his calling and the fascination comes from becoming a member of the living totality of individuals with different callings.\(^ {465}\) He does not pay too much attention to whether he accomplishes something important in the world in following his calling, since the word “accomplish” indicates a relation between his action and something outside him, and over this relation he has no authority. He just attempts to make full use of his talents and resources in following his calling.\(^ {466}\) When it comes to love and

\(^{463}\) *EO2*, 322 / *SV1* II, 289. Biblical references appear to be to Heb 9:27 and 2 Cor 5:10.


\(^{465}\) *EO2*, 290–293 / *SV1* II, 260–263.

\(^{466}\) *EO2*, 294–297 / *SV1* II, 264–266.
friendship, the aesthete lacks constancy. The ethical person, on the other hand, cannot think of attaching himself to another person in the way one attaches to finite and accidental things, conditionally, so that if difficulties arose, one could easily get rid of the relationship. For him the relationship to another spirit is absolute.\textsuperscript{467}

According to Judge William, when the ethical individual understands the meaning of work, has a calling and has constancy in love and friendships, his life becomes much more meaningful and beautiful than the life of the aesthete could ever be. William describes his own beautiful life:

I do my work as a judge in the court, I am happy in my calling; I believe it suits my capabilities and my whole personality; I know that it demands all my capacities. I try to mould myself more and more to it, and in so doing I feel also that I am developing myself more and more. I love my wife, am happy in home; I listen to my wife’s lullaby, and to me it is more beautiful than any other song, but I do not therefore believe that she is a singer; I listen to the little one cry, and to my ears it is not discordant. I watch his older brother grow and make progress; I gaze happily and confidently into his future, not impatiently, for I have time enough to wait, and to me this waiting is in itself a joy. My work has meaning for me, and I believe to a certain degree it also has meaning for others, even if I cannot define and measure it exactly. I rejoice that the personal lives of others have meaning for me and wish and hope that mine may also have meaning for those with whom I in my whole view of life am in sympathy. I love my native country, and I cannot imagine that I could really thrive in any other country. I love my mother tongue, which liberates my thoughts; I find that in it I can express extremely well what I may have to say in the world. In this way my life has meaning for me, so much that I feel happy and satisfied with it. Amidst all this, I also live a higher life, and when it happens at times that I inhale this higher life in the breathing of my earthly and domestic life, then I count my-

\textsuperscript{467} EO2, 301–302, 304, and 319 / SVII II, 269–270, 272–273, and 286.
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self blessed, then art and grace fuse together for me. Thus I love life because it is beautiful, and hope for one even more beautiful. 468

The quotation is passage expresses well the piety towards the given and the intimate connection to one’s surroundings that characterizes the ethical life. It shows that the ethical individual is bound to his environment through strong ties. It is worth noticing here, for in Postscript, where Judge William appears as the paradigm of ethical existence, it is not obvious.

On the whole, living ethically gives the individual a sense of security that someone merely living aesthetically lacks. 469 Judge William claims that only in the ethical view of life can self-directed and other-directed doubts about the meaning of life be put to rest. For an aesthete the meaning of life is always dependent on the prevailing of certain conditions. Even if all conceivable favors of life fall to his lot, in the middle of his happiness the aesthete would still have to acknowledge that what his happiness is due to (for example, beauty, wealth, renown, talent) cannot be given in the same degree to other people. Thus, his having meaning in life is based on special favors, and awareness of that makes him doubt the meaning of life. On the other hand, for an ethical person life has meaning regardless of conditions, the only condition being the ethical devotion of the person. Hence, it is only when regarded ethically that the life of every individual acquires beauty, truth, and meaning. 470 Judge William writes to the young aesthete:

When I look at life ethically, I look at it according to its beauty. Life then becomes rich in beauty for me, not impoverished in beauty, as it actually is for you. I do not need to travel all over the country to find beauties or to rake about for them in the streets; I do not assess and

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468 EO2, 323–324 / SV1 II, 290–291. (Translation slightly altered.)
469 EO2, 252 / SV1 II, 226.
470 EO2, 271–272 / SV1 II, 243–244.
sort out...If at times I have a free hour, I stand at my window and look at people, and I see each person according to his beauty, for I see him as this individual human being who nevertheless is also the universal human being. I see him as one who has this concrete task for his life; even if he is the lowliest hired waiter, he does not exist for the sake of any other person. He has his teleology within himself; he actualizes his task, he is victorious...He is bound to be victorious, of that I am convinced; that is why his struggle is beautiful. Ordinarily I am very disinclined to struggle, at least with anyone other than myself; but you may be sure that for this faith in the victory of the beautiful I will struggle for dear life, and nothing in the world will wrench it from me...With this faith I see the beauty of life, and the beauty I see does not have the sadness and gloominess that are inseparable of all nature and art, inseparable even from the eternal youth of the Greek gods. The beauty I see is joyous and triumphant and stronger than the whole world. And this beauty I see everywhere, also there where your eyes see nothing.\footnote{EO2, 275–276 / SV1 II, 247.}

If the passage in Judge William’s first letter that describes the highest of the aesthetic\footnote{EO2, 137 / SV1 II, 124–125.} could be called the first credo of the ethical-religious way of living poetically, the passage above could be called the second. Because he believes in the victory of the good, for the ethicist life encounters him as meaningful and beautiful wherever he finds himself.

If one then considers how a person experiences his own inner life, it becomes all the more clear that it is the ethical that makes life meaningful and gives it substance. The life of an aesthete is a succession of contrasting moods, a succession of isolated moments (Moment) without a meaningful continuity to them. In contrast to this, an ethical person sees his moods “beneath him,” because he has chosen himself infinitely and because he has “memory of his life.” He looks at the mood for a moment (et Øieblik), and this
moment saves him from living in the moment (i Momentet).\(^{473}\) In the life of an ethical person each lived moment (Moment) is led back to a "total view,"\(^{474}\) and this total view provides meaning and consistency to his life.

It is worth noticing that the total view that Judge William has is not only ethical, but religious. For him temporality is a gift of grace, a possibility of the finite spirit’s glorification. Echoing the idea in *The Concept of Irony* that the human being may become God’s “co-worker in completing the good work God himself has begun,”\(^{475}\) Judge William writes that the human being can come to assist God and gain a history by freely appropriating all that has fallen to his lot, both the joyful and the sorrowful.\(^{476}\) For example, if he meets sorrow in his life, he “does not take God to court but repents and loves God in his repentance.”\(^{477}\) In this way he “controls the sorrow ethically” and gives it an ethical expression—he appropriates it into his active, ethical life with the help of religious repentance. The judge writes:

As long as the sorrow is quiet and humble, I am not afraid of it; if it becomes violent, passionate, and sophistical and deludes me in despondency, I rise up. I tolerate no mutiny; I do not want anything in the world to trick me out of what I have received as a gift of grace from the hand of God. I do not chase sorrow away, do not try to forget it, but I repent. And even if the sorrow is of such a nature that I myself have no guilt in it, then I repent that I let it gain power over me; I repent that I did not immediately take it to God, and if that had happened, it would not have gained the power to delude me.\(^{478}\)

\(^{473}\) *EO2*, 229–230 / *SV* II, 206.
\(^{474}\) *EO2*, 118 / *SV* II, 107.
\(^{475}\) *CI*, 280 / *SV* XIII, 352.
\(^{476}\) *EO2*, 250 / *SV* II, 224–225.
\(^{477}\) *EO2*, 237 / *SV* II, 213.
\(^{478}\) *EO2*, 238 / *SV* II, 214.
Above we have investigated the ethical-religious situatedness of the individual in Judge William’s second letter. The view that the judge presents here is that the individual is always already situated in actuality. In the aesthetic existence he is immediately determined by his natural drives and passions, by his social milieu, and by his historical background. What happens in the ethical choice of oneself, then, is that the individual situates himself anew and actively, through his free will, as a self. In the choice the individual separates himself momentarily from his passive situatedness, but just in order to participate actively as in the social and historical actuality as an ethical agent. In freedom he chooses his given place in the world and in freedom he repents his sinful history, including the sinful history of his fathers. Through this action of repentance, which expresses his love for God, the individual becomes united with the life of the human race and comes into the most absolute continuity with the finite world.

In the ethical life that follows the choice of oneself, the individual participates freely and actively in the life around him. As he takes part in social and civic life and fulfills his tasks in the given order of things and in his specific surroundings, he follows his conscience and fulfills his personal duty. While he realizes the universal, he also reveals himself in the world. He considers his work as a calling and marriage and friendships as his duty. From Judge William’s descriptions we get a picture of the most intimate human situatedness. In accordance with the instruction given in *The Concept of Irony,* Judge William considers life as a gift and as a task and describes what it is to let oneself be composed poetically.

If we compare the second letter of Judge William with his first, the difference is that whereas in the first letter the passion of love occupied the center stage, in the second letter the individual will

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479 Cf. *CI, 276 / SVI XIII, 348.*
becomes emphasized to the extent that William comes to resemble a heroic existentialist. However, ultimately William does not put his faith in human will. The third letter he sends to his young friend shows that the foundation of ethical life is after all the passion of love, namely, the love and devotion that the human being has for God. We will come to this in subdivision 3.2.3 below.

3.2 The Irrationality of Living Ethically?

After having gained an overview on the ethical-religious way of living poetically, let us next consider its rationality. This helps us understand better how the ethical-religious individual situates himself in life, and it brings out clearly how his orientation in life differs from commonsense, scientific, and philosophical orientation in life.

In the following, we shall concentrate on three issues:

1) What is the ground and cause for the ethical choice?
2) What is the role and character of reflection in ethical-religious life?
3) What is the basis of ethical-religious truth?

3.2.1 Freedom of the Ethical Choice

As a fundamental condition for living ethically, Judge William emphasizes the importance of willing, the importance of the resolute choice of oneself as an ethical agent. First of all one should gain the appropriate earnestness to live an ethical life.\(^{480}\) It is this fundamental choice to make choices in earnest that his “either/or!” promotes first of all: he shouts it to A so that the latter

\(^{480}\) *EO2, 167 / SV I II, 152.*
would pull himself together, take responsibility for himself, and start making ethical choices in his life.\footnote{EO2, 157–158, 162–163, and 206–207 / SV1 II, 143–144, 148, and 185–186.}

In the first place, then, it is not good and evil that Judge William distinguishes with his either/or. First he wants to bring A to the point where the choice between good and evil truly begins to acquire meaning for A.\footnote{EO2, 168 / SV1 II, 152.} But in fact the choice of good is already implied in the ethical choice of oneself. The judge writes:

When I despair, I despair over myself as over everything else. But the self over which I despair is something finite like everything else finite, whereas the self I choose is the absolute self or my self according to its absolute validity. This being so, you will perceive again why I said previously and go on saying that the Either/Or I erected between living esthetically and living ethically is not a perfect dilemma, because it actually is a matter of only one choice. Through this choice, I actually do not choose between good and evil, but I choose the good, but when I choose the good, I choose \textit{eo ipso} the choice between good and evil. The original choice is forever present in every subsequent choice.\footnote{EO2, 218–219 / SV1 II, 196. (Translation slightly altered.)}

In choosing the self “according to its absolute validity,” the person actually already chooses the good.

Thus, the fundamental choice is between living aesthetically and living ethically. However, in considering this choice, theoretical thought does encounter a dilemma. It becomes a riddle as to how one comes to choose the ethical in the first place. The judge writes: “Wherever in the stricter sense there is a question of an Either/Or, one can always be sure that the ethical has something to do with it. The only absolute Either/Or is the choice between good and evil, but this is also absolutely ethical.”\footnote{EO2, 166–167 / SV1 II, 151.} A few pages...
later he writes: “Either a person has to live esthetically or he has to live ethically. Here, as stated, it is still not a matter of a choice in a stricter sense, for the person who lives esthetically does not choose...” But if we put these two statements together, we must ask: how does one choose the ethical in the first place, if only the ethical person chooses and he who lives aesthetically does not really choose at all? The ethical choice of oneself—the fundamental choice that the judge here surprisingly claims not to be “a choice in a stricter sense” at all—appears to be some kind of mysterious leap from the aesthetic to the ethical. Can it be given a reasonable explanation? Can we say what causes an aesthete to choose the ethical? Despair? But, as the judge recognizes, a desperate person can always try to escape his despair. Or he can surrender himself to despair, intoxicate himself with it without choosing himself ethically.

It seems that in the end we cannot explain by reason, and cannot know, what makes someone take the step into ethical life. But this is quite in line with the thought of Judge William and that of

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485 The dilemma is similar to the Socratic dilemma that Johannes Climacus discusses in his *Philosophical Fragments*: how does someone, who is in untruth, come to know, or even seek, the truth? (See *PF*, 9 / *SV* IV, 179.)

486 “You see, there is an Either/Or here...If you do not want this, if you want to go on amusing your soul with the trifling of witlessness and the vainglory of the intellect, then do so. Leave your home, emigrate, go to Paris, devote yourself to journalism, court the smiles of languid women, cool their hot blood with the chill of your wit, let it be your life’s proud task to dispel an idle woman’s boredom or the gloomy thoughts of a burned-out sensualist; forget that you were a child, that there was piety in your soul and innocence in your thoughts; muffle every lofty voice in your heart, loaf your life away in the glittering wretchedness of social gatherings; forget that there is an immortal spirit within you, torture the last farthing out of your soul; and when your witness lapses into silence, there still is water in the Seine and gunpowder in the shop and traveling company for every time of the day. (*EO*2, 206–207 / *SV* II, 185–186.)”

487 According to the judge, this is the predicament into which A has ended up so far. (See *EO*2, 193–195 / *SV* II, 175–176.)
Kierkegaard’s other pseudonyms. The ethical choice is an act of freedom and is as such ultimately inscrutable. However, although the transition from the aesthetic to the ethical life is unexplainable by the sciences that build on necessity, that does not make it less real. Only an immanent scientific, that is aesthetic, imagination loses the thread when it comes across this transition.\footnote{488} For an existing individual the possibility of the transition is clear, at least it ought to be: he ought to know himself as free. That is why Judge William shouts “either/or!” to A: he, as if, preaches to A in order to wake him up to the reality of choice.\footnote{489}

Judge William seems to think that freedom belongs to the human spirit as its original quality. Freedom is already in the human being as a possibility, and it just has to be actualized. Similarly, one already has the ideal of the good within oneself and through ethical choice this ideal comes to have actual significance. In other words every person has the ethical will and the ideal within himself \textit{kata dynamin}, potentially. But, on the other hand, since everyone is also free, there is no waterproof method for helping someone to actually become ethical.\footnote{490} Information and enlight-
enment in itself cannot have decisive influence, since being ethical depends eventually on will, not on knowledge. The same goes with coercion and force: one cannot force another person to actually be ethical, since in the end it is only the free individual who can be so.

However, according to Judge William, other human beings may all the same have some significance for someone to change his way of life. First of all, he himself tries to influence A with his personal example, with his description of the beauty of ethical life, and with his personal solicitude. Second, he believes that even if in his recklessness A did not care for his own life, he might take possession of himself in order to save another person from perdition. Thus he makes A think of a younger person, who would trust him and turn to him for guidance. In such a situation, the judge assumes, A, moved by his love for the young man, would give up his ironic attitude: “You would strengthen his soul, vindicate him in the confidence he had in the world; you would assure him that there is a power in a human being that can defy the whole world; you would urge him very strongly to use his time.” However, the problem with this exhortation would be that A’s own life would not be in harmony with his words. Therefore, he would be deceiving the young man, and if the young man found out about it, A’s actual existence would turn out to be a most powerful argument against his words. For that reason, in order not to betray such a young person, the judge suggests A should pull his life together.

Third, as an ideal point of departure for healthy, ethical despair Judge William considers love (being in love with a girl or religious love of one’s fellow humans), and the need to overcome the empty
distinctions of the finite which is connected with it. Love makes a person realize how wrong he has been in building his life upon such distinctions.\textsuperscript{494}

However, that relationship to other people may serve as an occasion and incitement for a person to choose the ethical presupposes, of course, that the person in question is already inclined towards the ethical. If this is not the case, a person may ignore his friends, escape his responsibility for those under his influence, and take love just as an aesthetic adventure. Thus, in determining the lot of a man the contribution of the free will remains decisive. Neither rational, empirical, or ethical grounds nor external causes may displace the free decision of individual will.

3.2.2 Reflection in Ethical-Religious Life

In taking freedom and free will in earnest, and in emphasizing their significance, Judge William sets himself against the wisdom of philosophers. Presenting himself as a layman without any ambitions in the field, he nevertheless occasionally points out his position in relation to philosophy. He criticizes the distracted existence of Hegelian philosophers, who one-sidedly lose themselves in the past. Judge William is displeased to see young men, who play with the titanic forces of history but are unable to tell a plain man what he has to do in life, and who do not know any better what they themselves have to do. According to the judge, behind the phenomenon is a confusion between two spheres, that of thought and that of freedom. Between these spheres there is a difference. In the sphere of thought necessity rules, but for the acting individual there exists an either/or: he must choose freely and through his choice determine his life. A distracted philosopher is in his thoughts and forgets that he participates all the time in the life

\textsuperscript{494} EO2, 209–210 / SVI II, 188.
that moves forward. Absorbed in philosophy, in the past, in necessity, he knows not the blessed life of freedom. Contrary to this absent-mindedness of Hegelian philosophers, Judge William fights for freedom, for the time to come, for either/or.  

On the other hand, the ethical view of Judge William is also an alternative for the abstract, ahistorical existence of the Greek philosopher. The judge states that what his choice of oneself attempts to put in practice is nothing less than the Socratic project of knowing oneself (gnōthi seauton). According to Judge William, will and involvement in the concrete actuality are prerequisites for self-knowledge. When it is himself that the individual is to know, taking distance to his own actuality and assuming a disinterested attitude towards it will not take him closer to the "object" of his cognition. An ironist who hovers above himself and the whole world will never come to know himself. According to the judge, the abstract is the opaque, the indistinct. The individual may become transparent to himself only by taking responsibility for his concrete being and by identifying himself with it.

It is an illusion, then, that one could reach an insight into one's true nature by rising above all illusions with the help of reflection. To find oneself, to find the essential, one need not and should not give up the actual self that is already situated in the given actuality. In the choice of oneself pictured by Judge William one keeps hold of this self even while taking distance from it: as noted above, it is not doubt, it is despair that lays bare the self, and accordingly the self discovered is not spirit as pure consciousness, but a free spirit that is involved in the concrete actuality. Next, one should acknowledge and take responsibility for this concrete self—one should become engrossed in its concrete actuality. Taking one's life in earnest and taking responsibility for it will lead into repen-

496 EO2, 258 / SV1 II, 231–232.
497 EO2, 248 / SV1 II, 222.
tance, and in and through repentance one will eventually reach as a concrete person the eternal, the infinite.

In the aspiration for appropriating one’s concrete actuality, Judge William sees the difference between his ethical view and that of Socrates and his followers. In both views the way to become ethical involves disengagement from immediacy, from the aesthetic and from the surrounding world. But whereas in the ethical choice this moment of abstract freedom is immediately cancelled, for a Greek philosopher abstraction became a permanent state. Echoing Magister Kierkegaard, the judge claims that the Greek philosopher was just interested in developing himself into a paragon of personal virtues without feeling any affinity with the surrounding world. His ethical action did not turn towards the world where he had lived—for him the surrounding world and its inhabitants were fundamentally just means for his self-development. According to Judge William, the error of the Greek philosopher was that he had chosen himself abstractly. Against the Greek philosopher the judge holds that when one chooses oneself that does not mean that one becomes autarchic and autonomous—after a person has chosen himself he does not own himself. In the genuine choice of oneself one chooses oneself in one’s concreteness, and repentance places the individual “in the closest connection and the most intimate relation with an outside world.” In the life that follows the choice, the individual tries to fulfill his task in the divine order of the world.

But is it really possible to lead such an ethical-religious life in a post-Enlightenment society dominated by critical reflection? Judge William is conscious that he lives in a reflective age. Such an age he sees as an age of disintegration: “Our age reminds one very much of the disintegration of the Greek city-state: everything re-

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500 *EO2*, 241 // *SV1* II, 216.
mains as it is, and yet there is no longer anyone who believes in it. The invisible spiritual bond, which gives it validity, has vanished. While Judge William claims that an ethical individual is always able to find his place in world and to live “in the most intimate relation” with the surrounding world, we may ask, how does his ethical-religious view fit into his reflective, disintegrating age.

Obviously, the relationship of the ethical-religious individual to his aesthetically and scientifically oriented contemporaries, to their view and way of life, is bound to be polemical. But this does not need to take away any of its intimacy, on the contrary: a passionately polemical relationship may indeed be a most heartfelt and intimate relationship. If the ethical individual truly cares for his fellow beings and has strong sympathy for them, then his polemics may be seen as works of love: in trying to lead his neighbor towards the truth, he loves them in truth.

Judge William, at least, does his best to make it as easy as possible for his aesthetic-reflective friend to receive his ethical-religious truth. In his polemics he tries to respond in an edifying manner to the challenge that critical reflection and calculating reason posit to the ethical-religious life. Judge William also incorporates reflection in his own ethical-religious life-view. As an element, reflection clearly belongs to the ideal life outlined by Judge William: the ethical-religious individual tries to become transparent to himself and attain self-consciousness. But on the other hand, the reflection of the ethical individual differs from the commonsense reflection that calculates the easiest, the most enjoyable and successful ways to adjust oneself to the finite and temporal world. The ethical-religious relation to the absolute, to the eternal, and to the good determines the reflection of the ethical individual.

The reflection of the ethical individual also differs clearly from the speculation of modern philosophers. In it transparency, i.e.

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501 EO2, 19 / SVI II, 18. (Translation slightly altered.)
self-knowledge, is being sought through concrete ethical striving, in which passion and will also play essential roles. It is the concrete individual situated in the historical actuality that tries to become transparent to himself. Judge William’s ethical subject, who reflects himself, is not a transcendental subject or a pure spirit, but a concrete person, who is placed in time and space and who has to reach the truth while participating in the changeable world. Such a subject cannot become transparent to himself in his concreteness only through abstract reflection. When it comes to ethical knowledge, passion and will are always involved. Knowing oneself is motivated by love for the other and requires choosing oneself. Moreover, if the individual chooses himself truly, he must choose himself as situated in the historical world. In this world the individual may lose himself, for example, by pursuing enjoyment or self-sufficiency, and thus the attainment of self-knowledge is not just a matter of reflection—it is a matter of living in the right way.

The ethical-religious individual receives the historically given phenomenal actuality as a gift from God and considers taking care of it as his ethical task. The reflection that takes place in these conditions is, obviously, not neutral and independent; it is already and all the time determined by this ethical-religious situatedness. Defending the ethical-religious way of living poetically, the judge is clearly against the skepticism typical to modern, critical philosophical reflection. This is illustrated by Judge William’s analysis of marriage in his first letter. Judge William maintains in his letter that it cannot be part of marriage “to annihilate first love by doubting the possibility of realizing it, in order through this annihilation to make marital love possible and actual.” Rather, first love must be secured against such skeptical reflection by being taken up “into a higher concentric immediacy” through the ethical-religious intention.\footnote{EO2, 29 / SVII II, 27–28.}
should have is not characterized by skeptical reflection with regard to love. According to the judge, love first girds itself with the religious “without having experienced any painful incident or anxious reflection beforehand.” In consequence, the ethical intention that marriage has is “not the acquired fruit of doubt but the over-abundance of the promise.” We see that there is a certain art here in avoiding pure and bare reflection that is cold, skeptical, impious, and unethical. Informed by his poetic vision Judge William deems that religious passion and ethical intention must always accompany reflection as contemporaneous. Otherwise marriage loses its beauty and the poetic character of life gets distorted.

Admittedly, in the second letter of Judge William there appear movements of spirit that correspond to scientific doubt and the negation of the phenomenal, namely despair and repentance. But despair and repentance do not negate the substantial actuality of the concrete subject: despair holds on to it and repentance attempts to save it, to transfigure it. Through despair the individual comes to choose himself ethically, through repentance he finds his way into God; neither movement forsakes the concrete ethical-religious actuality for the sake of objective scientific knowledge.

As noticed above, in Judge William’s eyes his own age, which he characterizes as “the age of reflection,” resembles the age of the dissolution of the Greek city-state. What happened to the classical Greek culture threatens in his time the Christian culture. The invisible spiritual bond, which gave life to the institutions, is no longer there. Although everything remains as it is, no one believes in it anymore. Reflection has hollowed out the forms of life so that soon only the outward form is left of what was once a culture enlivened by Christianity. If we consider Judge William’s ethical view as a remedy to this sickness of the time, then the remedy he rec-

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503 EO2, 58 / SVI II, 53.
504 EO2, 61 / SVI II, 56.
ommends is reformation from within. Through their ethical choices the individuals should take possession of their concrete, historical existence and save themselves from the perdition of abstraction. If they succeed in this, they are also likely to benefit their fellow humans and the whole to which they belong. If this is the project of Judge William, then he is addressing and trying to heal the disease of dissolution that plagues the post-Enlightenment age, the age of reflection.

3.2.3 Subjectivity of the Truth

But one may still doubt whether it is actually possible to live ethically in the way Judge William advocates in the modern society, or for that matter in any society. Judge William writes that the individual has his teleology within himself and he makes conscience into the highest tribunal in personal ethical striving. He believes that in his action the human being is not supposed to directly follow established customs (Bestemmelser af Sæder) as if they expressed the absolute. These belong to the collective life of the people and, from the point of view of the subject, they lie in the external and are abstract. Instead, the individual should regard his personal being as the absolute and make the commandment, “You shall love God with all your heart,” which is concrete in the highest degree, determine his life.\(^{505}\) However, at the same time Judge William emphasizes that the individual stands in a living interaction with his surroundings and should open his self to the world in respect of his whole concretion.\(^{506}\) He has little sympathy for Christian anchorites, who escaped the sin of the world through mysticism. He thinks that the individual should keep hold of the given earthly relationships in which he finds himself. He main-

\(^{505}\) EO2, 255 / SV1 II, 229.
\(^{506}\) EO2, 262 and 274–275 / SV1 II, 235 and 246.
tains that the ethical expression for the consciousness of hereditary sin is not to exit the sinful world but to enter into it, to abolish its sinfulness, or, if that is not possible, to bear it. His view is that in and through repentance the individual should enter the life of the community and take part in it in an edifying manner. But is it so clear that a conscientious individual is able to carry out all this?

Judge William sees realizing the universal and becoming revealed as ethical goals. It is his view that the greatest thing would be to be a truly ordinary man: the more of the universally human an individual is able to realize in his life, the more perfect he is. The individual should actualize his potentialities as fully as possible and become integrated in the life of the race as completely as possible. But what if there is a fundamental contradiction between the established practices of the society the individual belongs to and his conscience? Judge William maintains that it is everyone’s duty to become revealed and to realize the universal, i.e. to work, to have a calling, to marry, and to have friends. But what if one lives in a society where instead of the universalistic ethical ideology that Judge William adheres to, a selfish vitalistic ideology, reigns, where the ruling principle is not “to realize the universal,” but “to beat the competition.” Can one realize the ethical ideal in such an environment? Or what if only the ideology is ethical, but the society and its institutions serve, in fact, the oppression and exploitation of the poor and simple?

Judge William pays no attention to such abstract possibilities, but keeps his focus on the divine Governance and ethical will, instead. He believes that for every person there is a calling, and he believes that there is “a rational order of things, in which every human being, if he so wills, fills his place in such a way that he simultaneously expresses the universally human and the individ-

508 EO2, 328 / SV1 II, 294.
509 EO2, 280–322 / SV1 II, 251–289.
ual.” As the mother of all sins he sees the sin of not willing deeply and sincerely, the sin which can be discerned, for example, behind melancholy (Tungsind, depression). According to Judge William, the defect of his age is not oppression or exploitation, but melancholy, for it is melancholy that bereaves him and his contemporaries of “the courage to command, the courage to obey, the power to act, the confidence to hope.” The judge writes that all of “young Germany and France” groans under this disease. Fundamentally, what is at stake is not the distortions of external material world. In fact, melancholy is a sickness of the spirit that manifests itself when the spirit is unable to gather itself out of its dispersion and make itself transparent. But to be in such a state is sin, the sin of not willing deeply and sincerely. According to the judge, this should be recognized, for once the person recognizes it and takes ethical responsibility for being melancholic the paralyzing effect of melancholy becomes removed. And it is not for physicians to cure this disease of spirit; only the spirit can cure it, for the disease has its roots in the spirit. Judge William closes his analysis of melancholy on an optimistic note: When [the spirit] finds itself all small sorrows vanish, all the causes that according to some are the cause of melancholy—that one cannot find oneself in the world, that one comes to the world both too late and too early, that one cannot find one’s place in life; for the person who owns himself eternally, it is neither too early nor too late that he

510 Eo2, 292 / SV1 II, 262.
511 Eo2, 23–24 / SV1 II, 22.
512 Eo2, 189 / SV1 II, 171. Presumably an allusion to the literary and political Young Germany movement and to its equivalents in France. Cf. CI, 275 n.1 / SV1 XIII, 347 n. See also SKS K2–3, 312–313.
comes to the world, and the person who possesses himself in his eternal validity will certainly find his meaning in this life.\textsuperscript{514}

Thus Judge William gives no ear to the effeminate whining about the wretchedness of the world, the miserable condition of the culture and society, etc. The individual himself is responsible for finding his place in the world.\textsuperscript{515}

On the other hand, Judge William admits that to reveal oneself and to realize the universal may in truth turn out to be impossible for the individual. He writes: “In every person there is something which to some degree prevents him from becoming transparent to himself, and this can be the case to such a high degree, he can be so inexplicably intertwined into the life-relations that lie beyond him, that he is almost unable to reveal himself.”\textsuperscript{516} A similar statement appears in the analysis of melancholy. Judge William writes that each human being will always retain a little melancholy—even that person whose spirit has gathered itself from dispersion so that he has become conscious of himself in his eternal validity. This is connected with hereditary sin, and it is due to the fact that no man can become perfectly transparent to himself.\textsuperscript{517} Finally, at the end of the second letter Judge William returns to the problem one more time. Here he takes up the case of a person, who wants to express the universally human in his individual life, but who stumbles upon difficulties. In considering the case of such an ex-

\textsuperscript{514} EO2, 190 / SVI II, 172. (Translation has been modified along the lines of Hannay’s translation. Cf. Kierkegaard 1992, 500.)

\textsuperscript{515} However, this attitude of William does not necessarily make him a conformist. The requirement of realizing the universal is not a requirement to suppress all conflicts. One may presume that in a state, where the government has come into the hands of scoundrels, Judge William would see it as his duty to make resistance against such “authorities,” and if the authorities, that is the scoundrels, were the people, then to fight against it.

\textsuperscript{516} EO2, 160 / SVI II, 146. (Translation slightly altered.)

\textsuperscript{517} EO2, 188–190 / SVI II, 170–171.
exception, Judge William comes to admit that ultimately the ideal of realizing the universal remains unattainable. But if a person has truly, with all his will, striven to realize the universal, he will still be able to find peace of mind, if he admits his deficiency in all humbleness. Judge William writes:

His grief will vanish again, will dissolve in harmony, because he will perceive that he has reached the limit of his individuality. He is well aware that every human being develops in freedom, but he is also aware that a person does not create himself out of nothing, that he has himself in his concretion as his task; he will once again be reconciled with existence in perceiving that in a sense every person is an exception, and that it is equally true that every human being is the universally human and also an exception.

But in resigning himself to the limits of his humanity, the exception shall not give up the ideal he has within him. He shall always admit that it would be more perfect to incorporate the entire universal in himself.518

In other words, the view of Judge William is that because of hereditary sin each individual is burdened with sin, that is, each individual is an exception from the universal ideal of human being, but this does not exempt the individual from ethical striving. If one cannot abolish sin and realize the universal, one can still bear sin ethically. Ethics does not release its hold on the individual easily. It is flexible, it can adjust itself to a new situation: in case one fails to fulfill the ethical task of realizing the universal—and, ex hypothesi, at least in some respects this is the case with all human beings—one has a new ethical task in assuming the appropriate attitude in this situation. When the individual becomes ethical and situates himself in the world ethically, he also assumes ethical responsibility for his situation.519 An ethical individual does not

518 EO2, 332 / SVI II, 298.
attribute guilt to other people, to society, or to the times. By maintaining his freedom, by striving ethically, he avoids fatalism and avoids resentment and making accusations. On the other hand he could not do this without religious repentance. Repentance transforms the evilness of the world into our evilness and our evilness into mine, so that the ethical individual may tackle and, with the help of God, overcome it. Thanks to repentance, then, the ethical individual may continue to strive ethically even when burdened with evil.

However, the reality of sin would in any case seem to imply that ethical existence could not be quite as harmonious as the judge makes it appear. Or, at least, that it is harmonious and beautiful only for the person that is not afraid of endless tasks and that believes—against all odds—in the final victory of the beautiful and the good. It follows that the ethical life is more beautiful than the aesthetic only for an ethical person, and for someone like A, who lacks ethical spirit, it might appear as rather miserable. This, however, might be quite in harmony with the view of Judge Wilhelm. The ethical choice is a genuine choice—it is free and, in the end, not determined by aesthetic reasons and calculations. It is not the aesthetic reflection, but the ethical will that sustains the ethical-religious life-view.

In the third letter, in the sermon by the Jutland pastor that Judge Williams sends as his last word to the young aesthete, it is clearly stated that the ethical-religious truth about life is fundamentally based on subjective conviction. At the same time, the subjective basis of the ethical-religious truth comes to be qualified further and deeper. It becomes clear that fundamentally it is religious passion that sustains the ethical-religious life-view.

However, it must be admitted that if this is the view of the judge, then his attempts to persuade A are based on hope against all odds. Had the judge been just a cold-hearted practicer of reflection, he would have never attempted to persuade his young friend?
The sermon has as its basis Luke 19:41–48, in which Christ weeps over proud Jerusalem that knows nothing of its oncoming destruction. The punishment of God is about to fall on the chosen people. The punishment that the sins of the fathers have called down falls now on the children and each member of the generation has to pay for the offense that the generation has committed: the righteous must suffer the punishment with the unrighteous, and the innocent share the same fate as the guilty.\footnote{EO2, 341–343 / SV1 II, 307–309.} The thought of such a punishment is quite revolting in as much as it contradicts the notion of justice that we have and that we are used to hold as holy. How can someone who loves justice accept that punishment falls on the innocent just as hard as on the guilty? And yet, this is how Scripture presents the destruction of Jerusalem and it says also: You are not to argue with God.\footnote{EO2, 343–344 / SV1 II, 309–310.}

In the face of this challenge posited by Scripture, only the notion that in relation to God a human being is always in the wrong is able to save the consistency of the ethical. But this thought itself appears at first sight as totally devastating. It seems to humiliate, to annihilate all the efforts of humankind in the past and in the future alike. The task that the sermon posits to itself then is to bring out the upbuilding that lies in this thought.\footnote{EO2, 344–347 / SV1 II, 310–312.}

The Jutland pastor tackles the task by noting that one who reflects his relationship to another subject neutrally and objectively usually experiences it as painful, if after having carefully examined the issue he is forced to acknowledge that he is in the wrong. However, for someone who loves, it is, on the contrary, the thought that the beloved could be in the wrong which is most painful. In fact, in a situation of conflict he can find peace only in the thought that he is in the wrong himself and the beloved is without fault. Here, in the case of love, the person stands in an
infinite relationship to another subject, for love has infinitized the relationship. 524

For love, then, the thought that a human being may never be in the right and the beloved God in the wrong is also joyous and upbuilding. 525 The matter-of-fact impossibility of such a situation is also recognized by thought: God who is in heaven is greater than a human being, his wisdom more profound than that of man, and his holiness greater than human righteousness—thus, it is impossible that God be in the wrong and a human being in the right. But when the person is forced to acknowledge this impossibility just on the basis of his concepts, he does not yet thereby appropriate the thought in his inwardness. He does not affirm the thought with his whole being, since to this he cannot be forced by reflection alone. Thus, for an unloving, unadoring person there is nothing upbuilding in the thought. 526 Only love is able to rejoice by the thought that a human being is always in the wrong in relation to God, for this thought ascertains that God’s love is always greater than ours. Love is not forced to acknowledge this, love acknowledges it freely—it is the sole wish of love. 527 Thus, for love the thought is upbuilding.

The pastor explains that when you are forced to acknowledge that God is always in the right, “you stand outside God.” But when you wish always to acknowledge it, then “you are hidden in God,” and “this is your adoration, your devotion, your piety.” 528 In this way love builds up the person and his relationship to God, and in the infinite relationship to God the person overcomes himself and the world, overcomes all doubt and the cares of doubt.

528 EO2, 350 / SV1 II, 315. The difference is between a forensic affair and an intimate love affair.
There is no more anxiety “that God’s governance was not wisdom but your plans were, that God’s thoughts were not righteousness but your deeds were, that God’s heart was not love but your feelings were.” The person no longer thinks that he is the measure of all things: in love he bases his life on solid ground—on the eternal, the infinite, the absolute. According to the pastor, in this adoration for God the person also overcomes and forgets the finite troubles that he has to suffer. But he does not forget to act. The thought of being in the wrong does not make him inactive as doubt and endless skeptical calculations do, for essentially the thought means that God’s love is always greater than ours, and this thought inspires to action.

At the end of his sermon the pastor exhorts the listener to turn to himself and to ask himself in earnest, whether he could wish that the situation were different. Could he wish that he were in the right and God in the wrong? The question is important, says the pastor, for it is the deep movements in the human spirit that are decisive for the salvation of human spirit: “[F]or one may have known something many times, acknowledged it; one may have willed something many times, attempted it—and yet, only the deep inner motion, only the heart’s indescribable emotion, only that will convince you that what you have acknowledged belongs to you, that no power can take it from you—for only the truth that builds up is truth for you.”

What is notable in the sermon is that here the human notion of justice is given up in the name of love and love for God saves the consistency of the ethical-religious life in the face of unjust events of history. The passion of religious devotion thus transgresses the limits of ethical reasoning: the universality of ethical relations and the sovereignty of human judgment are given up in favor of the

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529 EO2, 351 / SV1 II, 315.
531 EO2, 354 / SV1 II, 318.
sovereignty of God. However, this does not mean giving up the ethical life; on the contrary, it is the way to save the ethical in the face of the apparent unrighteousness of life. Thus, the passionate devotion is functional in that it saves the consistency of the ethical life. In having recourse to the religious truth that he finds within him, the subject does not escape historical actuality; on the contrary, the upbuilding religious truth is what ultimately helps him to keep hold of the ethical while living in apparently unrighteous, historical actuality. From the point of view of ethical life, absolute religious devotion could actually be considered rational.

3.3 The Ethical Way of Living Poetically

Let us now sum up the results of the exegesis and analysis above, and consider how *Either/Or* exemplifies the ideal of living poetically.

For Judge William reflection and theorizing are merely ancillary activities. He writes that theorizing is not his ambition and that his intention was not to give “a lecture on a doctrine of duty or to speak according to custom about duties to God, oneself, and one’s neighbor.” Instead, he wanted to show his young friend the beauty of the ethical life. Rather than constructing a philosophical theory, the judge wants to show how the individual reaches the highest of the aesthetic by living ethically. However, in doing this Judge William presents a vision on what it is to live ethically. Consequently, the judge comes to present a kind of theory of ethical life that articulates and gives content to the ethical-religious ideal of living poetically that was presented in *The Concept of Irony*.

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532 *EO2*, 266 / *SV1* II, 238.
533 *EO2*, 323 / *SV1* II, 289–290.
The ethical-religious ideal that Kierkegaard introduced in *The Concept of Irony* was that the individual should let himself be composed poetically. The individual should become conscious of what is original and divine in himself and let it come forth, so that he would become “for himself” what he is “in himself.” He should listen to the voice of what is distinctive in his individuality and help his individuality to develop harmoniously into a whole.\(^{534}\) At the same time the individual ought to fulfill his purpose in the actuality in which he is situated. He should understand that he has a definite given context into which he has to fit,\(^ {535}\) and he should consider historical actuality partly as a gift, and partly as a task.\(^ {536}\)

In his letters Judge William depicts how an ethical subject attains this ideal. The *passion of love* actualizes the infinite and the eternal in finitude and temporality, and creates a synthesis of necessity and freedom. Because love is such a wonderful gift, it is natural for the ethical-religious individual to sanctify it by religious thankfulness and to confirm it by ethical intention. Putting his trust in the governance of God, he holds on to love in all possible trials that he meets in life. In the marriage of the ethical subject, love prospers through time, goes through a dialectical development, and gains a history. Judge William shows that not the Romantic aesthete, but the married man is the one who is truly living poetically: acting out his part in the play written and directed by God and overcoming all the adversities in his inwardness, he attains the highest of the aesthetic—through his life he reconciles the ideal with the actual.\(^ {537}\)

But how is an aesthete like A, who has gone astray, to find his way back to ethical life? First, writes the judge, he has to despair in earnest, to choose himself in front of the eternal power, and to

\(^{534}\) *CI*, 280–281 / *SVI* XIII, 352.
\(^{535}\) *CI*, 283 / *SVI* XIII, 354.
\(^{536}\) *CI*, 276 / *SVI* XIII, 348.
\(^{537}\) *EO2*, 3–154 / *SVII* II, 3–140.
repent his history until he finds himself again in God. To this he may be motivated by his love for other human beings, but to be really moved into it, his own free will must arise and take charge of his life. After this he may reveal his ideal self in the given actuality. This means that following his conscience and fulfilling his duty, he realizes the universal. In work, in love, and in friendship he reveals himself in the social world and at the same time gains a personal history, in which time becomes not only a task, but also a gift of grace for him. As he fulfills his place in the living totality of ethical subjects his life becomes both meaningful and beautiful for him.\footnote{EO2, 155–333 / SV1 II, 141–299.}

But what if realizing the universal turns out to be beyond A’s power? Or, what if God does not co-operate with his ethical will and reward him in this life for his ethical endeavor? In such cases the subject may still save the beauty and meaningfulness of his life, if he loves God and lovingly recollects that in relation to God a human being is always in the wrong.\footnote{EO2, 328–354 / SV1 II, 294–318.} However, with these considerations that the pastor from Jutland puts forward in his sermon, we have already transcended the territory where the spirit of William prefers to dwell and struggle. The focus of Judge William is not in exceptions, but in the constant—and for the most part happy—realizing of the universal.

Fundamental to the life-view of Judge William is faith in harmony. The judge believes in the pre-established harmony of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious spheres.\footnote{EO2, 60 / SV1 II, 55.} Furthermore, he believes that the ethical individual is in harmony with other ethical individuals and with the world.\footnote{EO2, 190 and 246–247 / SV1 II, 172 and 221–222.} Finally, he believes in the harmony of the rational and the irrational: he believes that the deep movements in the human spirit may serve and fulfill a divine plan. Indeed, his poetic vision of ethical life is characterized by a
certain superabundance and purposefulness of the irrational within the rational order: the passion of love, free will, and faith in the eventual victory of the good and beautiful carry the subject and help him to fill his place in life.\textsuperscript{542} His view seems to be that rather than control and rule the passions and will, reflection should be influenced and imbued by good passions and will, and serve them.

The harmony that Judge William envisions is also full of contrasts and tensions, but in his view these make life even more beautiful. It is the struggle that is beautiful in as much as the ethical person who struggles and sees the struggle of others is certain of the eventual \textit{victory}. The art is to see the struggle in the right spirit.\textsuperscript{543} The art is also in weaving together passion, will, and reflection in his life. If the ethical individual succeeds in this, he succeeds with God’s help. In such case “art and grace fuse together for him” and he experiences life as beautiful.\textsuperscript{544}

As a precondition for the harmony of spheres, Judge William posits \textit{concentricity}. He assumes that the aesthetic, ethical, and religious spheres are concentric with each other, and he admits that if he would assume the eccentricity he would never arrive at concentricity.\textsuperscript{545} Accordingly, he does not much emphasize the eccentric Christian revelation, which brings out the contrast and contradiction between the divine and the human. In fact, the only revelation in time that he writes about is the revelation of the ethical self in the world.\textsuperscript{546} His faithfulness to the idea of concentricity also shows in his view that the individual has his teleology within

\textsuperscript{543} \textit{EO2}, 94–97 and 275–276 / \textit{SV I} II, 86–89 and 247.
\textsuperscript{545} \textit{EO2}, 47–48 / \textit{SV I} II, 44.
\textsuperscript{546} \textit{EO2}, 322 / \textit{SV I} II, 289.
himself and, therefore, stands higher than every relationship. All the fanatic eccentricity that some people attach to the Christian faith is thereby excluded.

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547 EO2, 274–275 / SV1 II, 246.
548 One wonders why the judge keeps writing about hereditary sin and why he includes the sermon of a pastor in his letters. Perhaps the pseudonym has not yet quite understood his position in Kierkegaard’s authorship. In *Stages on Life’s Way*, Wilhelm, or his double Vilhelm (cf. *SV* I, ix with *SV* VI, 80), more consistently represents a middle stage between living aesthetically and living religiously. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, however, Johannes Climacus offers another explanation. In Judge William’s letters the Christian religiousness is only nominally present, while in fact, for the sake of keeping the work ethical, the Christian elements are consistently vitiated. Thus, Judge William does not present the genuine Christian conception of sin, even if he writes about sin, and therefore he never seeks the upbuilding, as Christians do, outside the ethical-religious subject, in Christ. (See *CUP*, 268 / *SV* VII, 227 together with *CUP*, 561 n.2 / *SV* VII, 489 n.2.)
4 The Ethical, Religious, and Humorous Spheres of Existence

In *Either/Or*, Part II, Judge William represents an ethical-religious, rather than just ethical, way of living poetically. He refers phenomena of life such as falling in love back to God. He trusts on God’s governance amidst his material cares of life and trusts that God takes care of the part of actuality that is not in his control. He attempts to base his own existence transparently on God in that he chooses himself in front of “the eternal power” as the concrete person he is, and “repents himself back into himself, back into the family, back into the race, until he finds himself in God.”

In his life he tries to fulfill God’s purpose in that he considers himself as an actor in a drama that a deity is writing. He believes that the commandment “You shall love God with all your heart,” captures in concrete form the content of the ethical law. He also takes it for granted that he is a Christian: he defends Christian marriage against his young friend and praises the Christian view in contrast to the philosophical view that assigns everything necessity instead of freedom. On the other hand, the revelation of truth in Christ does not play any central role in his concentric view of life.

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* the concentric ethical-religious sphere of *Either/Or* is split up into three spheres—the

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549 EO2, 47–48, 97, and 286 / SV1 II, 43–44, 88–89, and 256.
550 EO2, 177 and 216 / SV1 II, 160 and 194.
551 EO2, 137 / SV1 II, 124–125.
552 EO2, 255 / SV1 II, 229.
Chapter 4: The Ethical-Religious Spheres

spheres of ethical existence, Religiousness A, and humor—and all three spheres are characterized as *immanent* in contrast to Religiousness B, Christianity.\(^{554}\) As was already the case in *Stages on Life’s Way*, Judge William appears here as a paradigm of the ethical individual in contrast to the genuinely religious ones.\(^{555}\) On the other hand, according to Johannes Climacus, the ethical stage and Religiousness A lie close to each other and communicate constantly with each other.\(^{556}\) Thus, instead of Religiousness A he sometimes uses the expression “the ethical-religious sphere.”\(^{557}\) Common to the spheres of ethical existence, Religiousness A, and humor is the ethical relationship to God.\(^{558}\) Negatively the spheres are united by being “immanent” in comparison to the radically transcendent Christian religiousness. The individual does not base his relationship to God on some historical condition, that is, his personal relationship to Christ does not play any decisive role in these spheres. Instead, the individual relies on his immanent awareness of God and seeks the relationship to God immanently, i.e. within himself.\(^{559}\)

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\(^{556}\) CUP, 162, 294, and 388 / SV I VII, 134, 252, and 336.
\(^{557}\) CUP, 519, 534, and 561 / SV I VII, 453, 466, and 489.
\(^{559}\) See CUP, 572–573 / SV I VII, 498–500. Here we may already note that Climacus uses the term “immanent” in his own peculiar way. In the ethical, immanent religious, and humorous existence the individual does transcend the changeable world and reaches for the eternal. However, these spheres are immanent in the sense that the subject is thought to have the capacity to do immanently, in himself: he does not need to receive the capability from a source that transcends the sphere of his existence. In the Christian sphere the immanence is broken as the unknown, the radical other of the subject, addresses the subject from without (see subdivision 5.1.2 and chapter 6 below).
The ethical-religious position of Judge William in *Either/Or* shares these positive and negative characteristics. However, in it the historical and theological context of these forms of immanent existence comes better into view. Thus, it provides a good starting point for investigating the situational aspects of the ethical, immanent religious, and humorous existence in *Postscript*. With *Either/Or* in the background, let us now investigate how the subject situates himself into his context, and what happens to the ideal of living poetically in the ethical, immanent religious, and humorous spheres of existence. I will begin by bringing out the main features of the ethical existence in *Postscript*.

According to Climacus, every individual’s *ethical task is to become a whole human being*. While in a scientific presentation one may ascend from the psychical-somatic level to the psychical and, finally, to the pneumatic level (i.e. to the highest level, the level of spirit), in existence it is important to remember that “all elements are present simultaneously.” Climas recognizes that in science and scholarship thinking and knowing dominate over other activities that belong to existence: “One does not love, does not have faith, does not act; but one knows what erotic love is, what faith is, and the question is only about their place in the system.” However, he claims that when it comes to actual existence, thinking should not be superior, but coordinate to imagination and feeling. The ideal of Climacus is equality and contemporaneity of all the elements that essentially pertain to human existence. While in science truth is emphasized above all, in existence “the true is not superior to the good and the beautiful.” The true, the good, and the beautiful all belong to human existence and they should be united in existing. Poetry, for example, which corresponds to

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560 *CUP*, 346 / *SV* VII, 300.
561 *CUP*, 344 / *SV* VII, 298.
imagination and the beautiful, should not be dismissed from human existence as a surmounted element: “[A]s long as there is a human being who wants to claim a human existence, he must preserve poetry, and all his thinking must not disturb for him the enchantment of poetry but rather enhance it,” maintains Climacus. The same holds with religion. The expectancy of an eternal happiness hereafter might be a conception of the finite understanding that cannot maintain itself under the scrutiny of thinking. But, on the other hand, is abstract thinking able to maintain itself against existence? For a person who actually exists the distinction “here and hereafter” is valid regardless of the results of abstract thinking.

The ideal ethical thinker, therefore, is not the abstract, disinterested, and objective thinker, but the existing subjective thinker. According to Climacus, a subjective thinker needs imagination, feeling, dialectics, and above all passion, since existing—the “prodigious contradiction,” the synthesis of eternity and temporality—cannot be considered without becoming passionate. Putting the elements of existence together demands passion and art. Climacus states that to exist is an art (Kunst) and the subjective thinker is an artist, who “is esthetic enough for his life to have esthetic content, ethical enough to regulate it, dialectical enough in thinking to master it.” The ethical task of the human individual is, according to Climacus, equality and contemporaneity of imagination, feeling, and thinking in existence.

Contemporaneity is the ethical task also with regard to the various ages in life. Whereas in the life of an animal the successive periods of life—youth, adulthood, death—just follow each other,
a human being is able to ennoble the successive in contemporaneity. In the everyday life of the ethical individual there should be purpose and continuity, claims Climacus. A human being is composed of the eternal and the temporal. He is situated in existence and by existing he is in time. The process of time is a process of constant becoming. As existing in time, a human being and everything that is in him comes to take part in this process. In human existence, therefore, the eternal also submerges into the process of becoming, claims Climacus. Thus, for the existing person the eternal properly appears as the future that is becoming, and his task is to relate his temporal existence to this goal (Maal), which also serves as a measure that gauges it. According to Climacus, truly to exist is to permeate one’s existence with consciousness that, already as if far beyond existence, measures existence from the point of view of the eternal, but that is simultaneously present and participates in the process of existence. The attempt to relate the becoming of existence in this way to the eternal goal arouses passion. It is the “idealizing passion” that anticipates the eternal in existence, makes it concrete in existence, and thereby provides continuity to existence. Without the impassioned consciousness of the eternal goal, “everything just disappears” in the process of time and there is no continuity in the life of the individual.

570 CUP, 312 / SVI VII, 268.  
571 CUP, 192, 301, and 311–312 / SVI VII, 160, 258, and 267.  
573 CUP, 308 / SVI VII, 264: ”Men det i Sandhed at existere, altsaa med Bevidsthed at gjennemtrænge sin Existents, paa engang evigt ligesom langt ude over den og dog nærværende i den og dog i Vorden; det er sandeligt vanskeligt.”  
574 CUP, 311–313 / SVI VII, 267–268.
However, what passion anticipates is still only the possibility of continuity and in the concrete ethical existence this possibility should be actualized. With “actuality” (Virkelighed) Climacus understands the action that takes place through the ideality of inwardness: “The actuality is not the external action but an interiority in which the individual annuls possibility and identifies himself with what is thought in order to exist in it.” Since the existing individual is able to have first hand knowledge only of his own inwardness, every actuality other than his own is for him only a “thought-actuality,” that is, a possibility. To take the outer as identical with actuality is to fall to the illusions of sense perception and historical knowledge. “The individual’s own ethical actuality is the only actuality,” claims Climacus.

Such polemic ethical statements do not mean that Climacus would consider the individual subject as the ground and master of his own world. Climacus is not a subjectivist, and neither is he an idealist in any modern sense of the word. This becomes clear from his other statements. Climacus, for example, advocates “concrete thinking” by which he means “thinking where there are a thinker and a specific something (in the sense of particularity) that is being thought, where existence gives the existing thinker thought, time, and space.” In other words, the spatio-temporal existence

575 CUP, 313 / SVI VII, 269.
576 CUP, 339 / SVI VII, 293.
579 CUP, 327 / SVI VII, 282.
580 CUP, 332 / SVI VII, 287. Climacus seems to think himself that to demand concreteness from thinking equals a refutation of speculative idealism and all abstract thinking that gives up the existence in which the individual is situated. He writes: “Precisely because abstract thinking is sub specie aeterni, it disregards the concrete, the temporal, the becoming of existence, and the difficult situation of the existing person because of his being composed of the eternal and the temporal situated [bestedt] in existence (CUP, 301 / SVI VII, 258).” In Climen
that encounters the consciousness of the concrete subject is not just an idea in his mind. Climacus is clearly not a “material idealist,” who would consider spatio-temporal objects merely as representations in the mind of the subject. On the other hand, Climacus does seem to advocate a kind of “formal idealism” according to which the subject is bound to comprehend and mould the given singular material in the light of some general ideas. Climacus seems to be a realist when it comes to the givenness of the “specific existing something” in existence, but an idealist when it comes to the conceptualization of that specific something: we relate to something that makes itself present in our existence, but we are able to think of that specific something only in the light of general concepts, ideas. However, this formal idealism of Climacus seems to be Platonic, not Kantian, since he argues against the Kantian and for the Greek view that thinking and the abstract universals have reality (Realitet). The reality that thinking and ideas have is, however, only “thought-reality” (Tanke-Realitet), that is, “possibility,” which the subject may actualize in his ethical existence. Further, the idealism of Climacus could be characterized as “theological.” Climacus holds that the human spirit is a spirit derived from God. Moreover, he claims that the ethical

macus’ view Hegelian speculation falls in the category of abstract thinking. Even if it aims at concreteness, i.e. aims at all-encompassing comprehensiveness, it never reaches the level of the concrete existence, i.e. the finite and temporal existence of human individuals, but remains on the level of ideas. Climacus writes: “It is said again and again that thinking becomes concrete. But in what way does it become concrete? Certainly not in the sense in which one speaks of a specific existing something? Consequently, within the qualification ‘abstract,’ thinking becomes concrete, that is, it continues to be essentially abstract, because concretion means to exist, and to exist corresponds to the particular, which the thinking ignores. (CUP, 343 n. / SVI VII, 298 n.)”

581 See, for example, CUP, 324–325 and 332 / SVI VII, 279–280 ja 287.
583 CUP, 243 / SVI VII, 204.
knowledge the individual finds within himself is his “co-knowledge with God,” and that “every existing individual has a possibility-relationship with God” and in that possibility-relationship God plays the role of the Lord. To interpret, according to Climacus, God has created human beings, he gives them ethical ideas (possibilities) and capacity to actualize them, and he is the one that the ethical individuals obeys.

To sum up, while he emphasizes the ethical significance of subjectivity, Climacus is neither an epistemological, metaphysical, or ethical subjectivist. He does, indeed, challenge the teaching of science and scholarship that “becoming objective is the way” and “the subject’s task is to strip away more and more of his subjectivity and become more and more objective.” He does claim that the ethical-religious development of subjectivity is the highest task assigned to each and every human individual and, besides, a necessary precondition for appropriating Christianity. But he does not claim that “the accidental, the angular, the selfish, the eccentric, etc.” subjectivity would represent the truth as such. Climacus is neither an epistemological or metaphysical subjectivist: he denies that the particulars that the human consciousness experiences in existence would be the work of human consciousness, and he maintains that the universals it confronts in thought have reality and are independent of human existence.

Nor is Climacus an acosmist, who would deny the reality of the structured external world in which human existence and, as part of it, human thinking take place. When Climacus writes that actual-

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584 CUP, 155–156 / SVI VII, 127–129. Cf. also the passage in The Concept of Irony, where Magister Kierkegaard criticized Kant’s criticism for giving up the inheritance of dogmatics. It was this mistake that let the modern speculation astray with the result that the I became leaner and leaner and ended with becoming a ghost. (CI, 272 / SVI XIII, 344. Quoted above in subdivision 1.1.)
586 CUP, 131 / SVI VII, 106.
ity is not the outer and that “the individual’s own ethical actuality is the only actuality,” he does not mean to deny that the subject is situated in the world. Instead, his point is simply that the inward activity of the subjects, through which the eternal comes into temporality and the ideal becomes actual, is what is decisive in reality. He writes:

It is not denied that the actuality of action is so often confused with all sorts of ideas, intentions, preliminaries to resolutions, preludes of mood, etc. that there is very seldom any action at all... But take an action *sensu eminenti*; then everything shows up clearly. The external in Luther’s action was his appearing at the Diet of Worms, but from the moment he with all the passionate decision of subjectivity existed in willing, when every relation of possibility to this action had to be regarded by him as a temptation—then he had acted. When Dion boarded ship to overthrow the tyrant Dionysius, he is supposed to have said that even if he died on the way he would nevertheless have done a magnificent deed—that is, he had acted.587

From these lines it becomes clear, first, that actuality is not just a thought or intention of the subject, but is the internal activity—“passionate decision” and “existence in willing”—that aims to actualize the ethical ideal in the world. This internal ethical activity is what is decisive and essential, whereas its effects in the external always depend on the accidental and therefore cannot truthfully measure the ethical value of the action. But, second, it also becomes clear that the Climacean subject acts ethically in the historical world. While Climacus emphasizes ethical subjectivity, examples of Luther and Dion show that the ethical subject exists and actively takes part in the historical and social actuality. Thus, Climacus by no means denies the situatedness of the ethical individual.

Climacus writes that an existing human being is “composed of the eternal and the temporal situated [bestedt] in existence.” He also takes it for granted that someone has situated the human being in existence, namely, the “eternal spirit,” God. As noticed, he states that an existing human being is a derived spirit and God is his source. However, God does not relate to us human beings directly: “the wondrousness of creation” is that the almighty Creator does not make us into nothing, but leaves us certain independence. According to Climacus, the direct relationship to God is simply paganism and a break must take place before there can be a true God-relationship. God “is in the creation, everywhere in the creation, but he is not there directly.” Therefore, the single individual becomes capable of seeing him “only in the inwardness of self-activity.”

Thus, a human being indeed exists in the world created by God, but he cannot come to know God and his purpose in the objective way, that is, just by observing the world and world history. Neither does he discover ethical knowledge “with a world-historical eye on world history,” but finds it within himself. By this, Climacus does not deny the presence of the ethical in world history. He writes: “That the ethical is present in world history, just as it is present wherever God is, is therefore not denied, but

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588 CUP, 301 / SVI VII, 258.
589 CUP, 243 / SVI VII, 204.
590 CUP, 246 / SVI VII, 207. Cf. with this JP 2, 1251 / Pap. VII I 1181.
591 CUP, 243 / SVI VII, 204–205. Cf. also CUP, 203–204 / SVI VII, 170: “I observe nature in order to find God, and I do indeed see omnipotence and wisdom, but I also see much that troubles and disturbs. The summa summarum [sum total] of all this is an objective uncertainty, but the inwardness is so great, precisely because it grasps this objective uncertainty with all the passion of the infinite.”
592 CUP, 133 / SVI VII, 108.
593 CUP, 144 / SVI VII, 117.
rather that a finite spirit can in truth see it...” Neither does he deny “the reality of the world-historical development,” but only claims that a human being should leave the governing and judging of that development to God, to “the royal poet,” who alone is able truly to comprehend it. The parallelism is here with a king who has a royal theatre all for himself from which the ordinary citizens are excluded. Similarly, living human beings are excluded from world-historical considerations and referred back to their own lives, their own ethical development:

[T]he individual’s ethical development is the little private theater where God certainly is the spectator, but where on occasion the individual also is himself a spectator, although essentially he is supposed to be an actor, not, however, one who deceives but one who discloses, just as all ethical development consists in becoming disclosed before God. But to God, world history is the royal stage where he, not accidentally but essentially, is the only spectator, because he is the only one who can be that. Admission to this theater is not open to any existing spirit. If he fancies himself a spectator there, he is simply forgetting that he himself is supposed to be the actor in that little theater and is to leave it to the royal spectator and poet how he wants to use him in that royal drama, *Drama Dramatum* [the Drama of Dramas].

In other words, God does not appear to us directly in nature or world history. However, we are actors in a drama written by him. As a poet posits his characters in different situations on the stage, God posits us in different situations in existence and suggests to us ideas that we should actualize. As actors we should be more concerned with playing our part correctly, i.e. ethically, than with the plot and the outcome of the play. As actors in the divine drama we

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594 *CUP, 141 / SVI VII, 115.*
595 *CUP, 159 / SVI VII, 131.*
596 *CUP, 157–158 / SVI VII, 130.*
should neither be concerned with how God decides to use us, or whether he decides to use us at all, in the world-historical development. The highest task assigned to each human being is to become subjective—world history he should leave to the royal poet.\textsuperscript{597} Climacus writes:

A truly great ethical individuality would consummate his life as follows: he would develop himself to the utmost of his capability; in the process he perhaps would produce a great effect in the external world, but this would not occupy him at all, because he would know that the external is not in his power and therefore means nothing either \textit{pro} or \textit{contra}... Then if the power governing all things would want to dispose circumstances \textit{[Forholdene]} so that he became a world-historical figure—well, that is something he would first inquire about jestingly in eternity, for not until then is there time for the light-minded questions of carelessness.\textsuperscript{598}

The earnestness is in the inner ethical striving of the individual; the jest is that it pleases God to attach importance to the striving. It is not the merit of the individual, “if Governance arranges things so that a person’s inner striving is reflected magically in the shadow play of world history.”\textsuperscript{599} Climacus notes that if the highest ethical task assigned to a human being were a world-historical task, and not the task of becoming subjective, an existing individual would be driven to despair. A person cannot become a world-historical figure just by his own efforts and just by willing the good.\textsuperscript{600} Moreover, world-historically a single individual is nothing at all,\textsuperscript{601} and in world history a human observer sees mostly just undramatic squandering of individuals. If, however, becoming subjective is the highest task, then “there is no squandering, for

\textsuperscript{597} \textit{CUP}, 159 / \textit{SV} VII, 131.
\textsuperscript{598} \textit{CUP}, 135–136 / \textit{SV} VII, 110.
\textsuperscript{599} \textit{CUP}, 139–140 / \textit{SV} VII, 113.
\textsuperscript{600} \textit{CUP}, 133 and 136 / \textit{SV} VII, 108 and 110.
\textsuperscript{601} \textit{CUP}, 149 / \textit{SV} VII, 122.
even though individuals are as innumerable as the sands of the sea, the task of becoming subjective is indeed assigned to every person,” explains Climacus.602

However, while fulfilling his personal task the ethical subject is related to the other subjects. While Climacus considers as desperate all attempts to impress “the spirit of history” numerically by joining together in social and political associations (ved socialt at sette sig sammen),603 he believes that through his personal calling each individual finds his way to an ethical fellowship with every human being:

The ethical is and remains the highest task assigned to every human being. It may also be required of a devotee of scholarship that he understand himself ethically before he dedicates himself to his intellectual discipline, that he continue to understand himself ethically in all his labor, because the ethical is the eternal drawing of breath and in the midst of solitude the reconciling fellowship with every human being.604

Climacus refers approvingly to the view of Judge William that essential to the ethical is disclosure (Aabenbarelse), and that every human being’s ethical duty is to become open (at blive aaben-bar).605 Like the judge, he assumes that every human being possesses “what belongs essentially to being a human being,” and that his task is “to transform himself into an instrument that clearly and definitely expresses in existence the essentially human.” In fulfilling this ethical task the accidental differences, such as differences in talent, do not count. Like the judge, Climacus proclaims the gospel of the universal man: “To will to be an individual human being ... by virtue of one’s difference is flabbiness; but to will

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604 CUP, 151–152 / SV VII, 125.
605 CUP, 499–500 n. / SV VII, 434 n.
to be an individual existing human being...in the same sense as everyone else is capable of being—that is the ethical victory over life and over every mirage...“However, an existing human being is related to other human beings only indirectly. To the existing spirit the ethical actuality of other existing spirits is only a thought-actuality, that is, a possibility. “[E]thically there is no direct relation between subject and subject,” maintains Climacus.”

Unlike Judge William, however, Climacus realizes the risk and uncertainty involved in ethical life. He emphasizes more than the judge that as existing the human subject participates in the changeable existence (Tilværelse) and in its negativity. Even that which is certain—the eternal, the infinite—becomes illusive for him in that it becomes involved in the process of becoming. Consequently, committing oneself to the eternal and the infinite involves uncertainty and risk. From the point of view of the changeable existence the eternal can appear only as an uncertain possibility. Therefore, commonsense men with worldly wisdom tend to give up the high ethical ideals. An enthusiastic ethical individual, however, uses his understanding “to discover the danger—in order then to enter into it boldly.” By choosing “a strenuousness that is rewarded [in the world] with ingratitude and loss, instead of a comfortableness that would be rewarded with admiration and advantage” the ethicist breaks with the sagacious paltriness. Since in existence there is no objective certainty on the validity of the eternal, reliance on it becomes a matter of passion, a matter of faith. In this sense also Socrates had faith.

606 CUP, 356 / SVI VII, 309.
607 CUP, 321 / SVI VII, 276.
608 CUP, 81–82 / SVI VII, 63.
609 CUP, 140 / SVI VII, 114.
610 CUP, 568–569 / SVI VII, 496.
According to Climacus, “ethically everything culminates in immortality, without which the ethical is merely custom and habit.” The justification of the view seems to lie in the Socratic (or Platonic) connection between the ethical and the eternal: if the eternal is not the basis of ethical ideals and if the human soul does not participate in the eternal, then there is no solid basis for ethics, but ethics will depend on changeable customs and habits only. Climacus himself refers in this connection to Socrates. According to Climacus, the immortality of the soul was for Socrates just an uncertain possibility, but Socrates was all the same ready to stake his whole life on it. Climacus prefers this concrete, ethical proof of immortality for all the abstract theoretical proofs of immortality. He writes that this is the best demonstration for the immortality of the soul.

Here we have the main features of the ethical existence outlined by Climacus in Postscript. Let us now compare this model of ethical life with the models in The Concept of Irony and in Either/Or.

In the ethical existence of Postscript we again meet most of the characteristics of the ethical-religious ideal of living poetically that we encountered in The Concept of Irony. Climacus posits concrete, individual existence as the focus of ethical striving. Kierkegaard did the same in his dissertation as he set mastered irony and ethical striving both against the abstract artistry of the Romantic ironists and the abstract science of the Hegelians. According to Climacus, the ethical task is to become what one is, to become a whole human being, and to achieve continuity in life. In The Concept of Irony the ethical-religious ideal of living poetically was to become for oneself (für sich) what one is in oneself (an sich) and to “let the whole individuality develop harmoniously into a pliable

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612 CUP, 175 / SVI VII, 145.
form rounded off in itself.” On the other hand, continuity was what Magister Kierkegaard found lacking in the lives of the Romantic ironists. With all due respect to Hegel, however, the poetical elements of life need to be cherished in order to have continuity in existence. In Postscript Climacus maintains that ethical existence demands passion and imagination. In his dissertation Kierkegaard wrote about the need to have “enthusiasm.”

The ethical "art of existence" described in Postscript thus closely resembles the ethical-religious model of "living poetically" in The Concept of Irony. If one must point out differences, they are that in Postscript the Romantic ironists are no longer explicitly referred to, the criticism of Hegelian thinking is much more outspoken, and the need for a totality-view is no longer underscored. However, in depicting ethical existence Climacus does make use of an ethical-religious totality-view that is similar to that of Magister Kierkegaard. According to the view of Climacus, a human being is created by God and lives in the world that is created by God, whose intentions, however, are not completely revealed to him. For that reason both (mastered) irony and continuous ethical striving are needed.

The description Climacus gives of the ethical life is also compatible, to a large extent at least, with the description Judge William gives in Either/Or. Let me list the points of contact:

1) Both pseudonyms describe the ethical life through the analogy of a drama that is written by God, and both trust that God takes care of the whole world, and liberates the ethical individual to concentrate on his personal task and development.

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616 Cf. EO2, 97 / SVI II, 88–89 with CUP, 159 / SVI VII, 131.
2) Both pseudonyms see the ethical life as a *dialectical becoming*, in which the subject becomes himself, i.e. becomes what he is meant to become, namely, good.\(^617\)

3) While both pseudonyms seem to have appropriated the models of dialectical development from the German Idealists, both protest on ethical grounds against their abstract conceptions of self and against Hegelian systematic thinking. Instead of Hegelian world-historical orientation and speculative thinking *sub specie aeterni*, both require concentration on an individual’s own ethical actuality and concrete subjective reflection.\(^618\)

4) Both Judge William and Johannes Climacus cherish the *Socratic ideal of self-knowledge*, and regard the quest for transparency as an essential element in the attempt to become a better human being.\(^619\)

5) Both pseudonyms emphasize the *subjective dimension* of truth, the “how” of truth, in other words, the right ethical orientation of the subject towards truth.\(^620\)

6) Both give a central role to *passion* in general and to the passion of love in particular. Both for Judge William and for Johannes Climacus passion provides the potential and the material for ethical striving.\(^621\)

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\(^620\) Cf. subdivision 3.2 above with *CUP*, 202–204 / *SV1* VII, 169–171.

\(^621\) See in subdivision 3.1.1 what the judge writes about “first love” as the basis of marriage, and in subdivision 3.2.3 what the Jutland priest writes about love for God, and confer with *CUP*, 92, 161–162 n, and 311 / *SV1* VII, 73, 133 n, and 267.
7) Both hold openness and universality as ideals of ethical life and both hold in value the hidden spiritual kinship between human beings that the ethical creates.\(^{622}\)

8) Finally, both connect the ethical with the eternal and with the idea of personal immortality.\(^{623}\)

To put these common characteristics together, both William and Johannes include the poetical and religious as essential elements in the ethical life: the life of the ethical individual takes place in the imaginative, dramatic, “theological” setting as a dialectical development, in which the individual may (or may not) become what he is meant to be. Both pseudonyms protest against modern, disinterested scientific speculation and pitch the Socratic, ethical quest for self-knowledge against it; both strongly emphasize the personal, subjective dimension of life, especially passion, but insist at the same time on openness and universality as ethical ideals. In Either/Or and in Postscript alike, there is dramatic tension and passionate urge in the ethical life, the outcome of which lies hidden in the infinite and eternal. But at the same time the ethical subject remains convinced of the eventual victory of his good will.

However, having charted out the points of contact, we are also bound to face the points of difference. The most prominent difference is between the tones of voice and emphases of the respective pseudonyms. In the polemical rhetoric of Climacus subjectivity and existence definitely become much more emphasized than in the balanced and socially responsible letters of Judge William. Likewise, the contrast between subjective inwardness (relation to God) and the life in the external world becomes emphasized much


more. This is especially the case in the spheres of humor and religiousness $A$, but even in the ethical sphere the contrast is already clear. In Postscript the harmonious situatedness, described with persuasion by Judge William, is left for God to arrange and enjoy. The actor of the divine drama does not feel that he is at one with the poet and prompter of the drama any more. Consequently, he cannot enjoy the spectacle of his beautiful life as Judge William did.

Postscript underscores that the existing subject is situated in the continual stream of becoming. As a result, a lack of certainty concerning the eternal and infinite basis of life, i.e. the Socratic ignorance that we already became acquainted with in Kierkegaard’s dissertation, is again emphasized. The subjects are isolated, separated from the eternal and infinite, from each other, and from God by the negative that belongs to existence. This does not prevent them from establishing relationships with what lies behind the veil of a changeable world, but it makes this relating a risky business, a matter of faith: the relation is now emphatically located into inwardness, subjectivity.

In a sense this existentialist, individualistic emphasis in Climacus’ vision just intensifies and invigorates the poetic character of ethical life. Instead of the solid conviction of the married man and government official, we encounter in Climacus the creative uncertainty of an outsider. Climacus also makes it much clearer that there is no objective or social guarantee that the poor existing subject is able to reach the ethical ideal. But this only forces the individual to situate himself into his context more “poetically,” that is, with the help of passion, imagination, and faith. As all illusory certainties that pertain to the finite objective reality are decidedly given up, it now becomes more evident that the ethical individual may base his temporal and finite life only through passion, imagination, and faith on the eternal and infinite. In principle this intensification of poetic elements would not hinder lead-
ing a full ethical life as a responsible member of society. Having based his existence on the eternal and infinite, the ethical individual might still appropriate his concrete, historical self just like in *Either/Or*, Part II. He might repent himself “back into the family, back into the race, until he finds himself in God.”\(^{624}\) and then become integrated in the living body of ethical individuals through work, love, and friendship. The ethical individual of *Postscript* could end up living as happy and harmonious life as the judge, only a bit more poetic.

However, the development of the ethical-religious life does not proceed in *Postscript* as harmoniously as it did in *Either/Or*, Part II. In *Postscript* the movement of religious repentance that brought the subject back to the historical and social actuality seems to have lost its positive, integrating force. Instead of bringing the individual into the most absolute continuity with the world,\(^ {625}\) the equivalents of repentance in *Postscript*—religious suffering and guilt-consciousness—only bring the subject deeper into hidden inwardness.

Instead of a religious movement back to the world, we encounter in *Postscript* a religious movement into subjectivity. This is not due to the principle “Subjectivity is truth.” Essentially this principle says only that the primary task of the subject is to work on himself and only secondarily is he to concern himself about world history: “First, then, the ethical, to become subjective, then the world-historical.”\(^ {626}\) Thus, the principle in itself does not hinder the subject from taking part in the social and historical actuality. On the contrary, along the lines of Judge William, it might be considered as a necessary condition for an authentic ethical contribution to that actuality. However, in *Postscript* something in subjectivity becomes a stumbling block that brings the ethical pro-

\(^{624}\) Cf. *EO2*, 216 / *SV1* II, 194.

\(^{625}\) Cf. *EO2*, 249 / *SV1* II, 223.

\(^{626}\) *CUP*, 159 / *SV1* VII, 131.
ject of revealing oneself in the world to the ground. According to Climacus, when the subject works on himself ethically, he will discover that he has a disposition to evil. The more ethical he is, the more profoundly he makes this discovery and the less eager he is to occupy himself with the world-historical. Postscript follows the ethical subject on this journey into selfhood, moving step by step from the ethical principle “Subjectivity is truth” toward the Christian principle “Subjectivity is untruth.” Climacus writes: “[T]he work goes backward, that is, backward in inwardsness. The way is so far from being in the direction of the objective that the beginning only lies deeper in subjectivity,” According to Climacus, this is also what happens in existence and his examination simply seeks to reproduce it.

The negative, backward movement, which approaches but never reaches the certainty that “Subjectivity is untruth,” i.e. never reaches the Christian consciousness of sin, is typical to immanent religiousness, the religiousness of “hidden inwardsness” that Climacus also calls Religiousness A. Climacus considers this immanent religiousness as a stage that prepares the way and leads towards the Christian existence and as an element that belongs integrally to

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629 CUP, 526 / SVI VII, 459.
630 So, for example, in the footnote, where he spells out his “theory of stages” in the most comprehensive way (CUP, 531 n / SVI VII, 464 n), and so also in the claim he makes later in the book that “Religiousness A must first be present in the individual before there can be any consideration of becoming aware of the dialectical B (CUP, 555 / SVI VII, 488).” But how does Religiousness B, i.e. Christianity, presuppose Religiousness A? Climacus writes that Religiousness A is characterized by inward suffering and that Christianity presupposes such suffering: “The invitation to a religious address is quite simply this: Come here, all you who labor and are burdened—and the address presupposes that all are sufferers—indeed, that they all should be.” (CUP, 437 / SVI VII, 380. From the context it becomes clear that Climacus refers by a “religious address” to a
the Christian existence,⁶³¹ but also as an independent existential possibility that stands on its own and could have become actualized by an ethical-religious individual, even if Christianity had never appeared in the world.⁶³² As a preparatory stage Religiousness A drives the subject to Christianity: the incurable suffering and total guilt of the person existing in Religiousness A prepares the way for the salvation in Christ. However, as an independent possibility outside Christianity, Religiousness A stands on its own as an immanent alternative to it. In contrast to Christianity, Religiousness A seizes the eternal on its own and, as a result, understands the relation of a human being to the eternal in a way fundamentally different from that of Christianity.

The driving force in the religious subject that brings the ethical existence out of balance and leads the subject into hidden inwardness is his passion for an eternal happiness. According to Climacus, the highest good for the religious person is “an eternal

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⁶³¹ According to Climacus, Religiousness A constitutes “the pathos-filled” side of Christianity: “[A] person’s passion culminates in the pathos-filled relation to an eternal happiness (CUP, 385 / SVI VII, 333–334).” But it lacks “the dialectical” determination that is typical to Christianity: “The individual’s eternal happiness is decided in time through a relation to something historical in such a way that its composition includes that which according to its nature cannot become historical and consequently must become that by virtue of the absurd (ibid).” In consequence, it lacks also the higher pathos (CUP, 560 / SVI VII, 488), the “sharpened pathos” that the paradoxical dialectics of Christianity arouses in the subject: the pathos of sin-consciousness, the pathos of the possibility of offense, and the pathos of sympathy toward those excluded from faith. (See CUP, 581–586 / SVI VII, 507–511). According to Climacus, “Every Christian has pathos as in Religiousness A, and then this pathos of separation [that characterizes Religiousness B] (CUP, 582 / SVI VII, 508).”

⁶³² See CUP, 557 and 559 / SVI VII, 486 and 488.
happiness” (*en evig Salighed*) and in order to reach this *absolute goal* he is ready to venture everything, to give up every finite good, if needed. But as long as the religious person lives here on earth he is also bound to remain “in the relative ends.” Thus, it becomes his task simultaneously to relate himself absolutely to his absolute telos [end, goal], and relatively to relative ends. In other words, the person is bound to pursue also relative ends, but he should relate to them only relatively and not let the absolute telos be exhausted in them, for the absolute telos never becomes concrete in relative ends. In consequence the religious individual becomes a stranger in the world in the sense that he lives in the finitude, but does not have his life in it. He does not become indifferent to the finite, but in comparison to his occupation with the absolute, all finite activities seem to him like child’s play. He takes part in these activities like an adult takes part in children’s

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633 *CUP*, 391 and 404 / *SVI* VII, 339 and 351. Climacus is careful not to give any more specific definition for “an eternal happiness.” He writes that “eternal happiness, as the absolute good, has the remarkable quality that it can be defined only by the mode in which it is acquired...it is the good that is attained by absolutely venturing everything (*CUP*, 426–427 / *SVI* VII, 370).” However, the context of this statement shows that for an existing person eternal happiness may only appear in the future, it is a good that is “in store” for him who ventures everything here on the earth (see *CUP*, 424 / *SVI* VII, 368), and later Climacus does identify the eternal happiness that is expected in Religiousness A with immortality and eternal life: “A person existing religiously can express his relation to an eternal happiness (immortality, eternal life) outside Christianity, and it certainly has also been done, since it must be said of Religiousness A that even if it had not been present in paganism it could have been...(*CUP*, 559 / *SVI* VII, 488).”

634 *CUP*, 400–401 / *SVI* VII, 347.

635 *CUP*, 387 / *SVI* VII, 335.

636 *CUP*, 400–401 / *SVI* VII, 347.

637 *CUP*, 410 / *SVI* VII, 356.

638 *CUP*, 413 / *SVI* VII, 358–359.
games, but his earnestness is in practicing the relation to the absolute telos.  

According to Climacus, for a human being an absolute relation to the absolute telos implies inward suffering. The reason for this seems to be our situatedness in the historical world: as temporal and finite beings we have a history and through it we are already involved in the affairs of the world. Climacus also writes that in the beginning of his development the religious person always finds himself in immediacy and finds himself “in the relative ends absolutely.” Therefore he must always begin by renouncing within himself those relative ends. In other words, he must become dead to immediacy. In the concrete spiritual life this involves inward suffering.

Climacus understands this suffering as “the action of inwardness.” One reason why Climacus calls suffering an “action” might be that, while the religious suffering of the person is in itself passive, it results in part from his own activity: from his passionate, actively and willingly sustained relation to an eternal happiness and from his conscientious relation to God. The person relates with passion to an eternal happiness and, in the dialectic of

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639 CUP, 431 / SVI VII, 374.
640 CUP, 431–432 / SVI VII, 374–375. Cf. with this Judge William’s view that the self chosen ethically must be the concrete and historical self, and therefore repentance is needed (see EO2, 215–216 / SVI II, 193–194, or subdivision 3.1.2 above).
643 According to Climacus, “a person’s passion culminates in the pathos-filled relation to an eternal happiness (CUP, 385 / SVI VII, 333–334)” and suffering is “essential for the pathos-filled relation to an eternal happiness (CUP, 443 / SVI VII, 385).”
644 According to Climacus, “religiousness is inwardness...inwardness is the individual’s relation to himself before God, its reflection within himself, and...it is precisely from this that the suffering comes... (CUP, 436–437 / SVI VII, 379).”
existence, this action of relating results in the realization that he now has to reflect his life in front of God and, in consequence, to suffer from the consciousness of his impermanence and worldliness. As cases of inward, religious suffering Climacus mentions the apostle Paul’s “thorn in the flesh,” and the “spiritual trial” (Anfægtelse) that the religious person, for example Martin Luther, experiences when he has managed to renounce the relative ends: as if the higher now wants to frighten the finite individual back. Although Climacus does not mention them, religious suffering also seems to cover the negative phenomena that Kierkegaard is occupied with in his religious texts: melancholy, anxiety, and tendency to despair.

The second reason to regard religious suffering as “the action of inwardness” might be that the individual actively remains in this suffering, lives with it, and does not escape it into the external world. This is precisely the difficulty, since, as existing, the individual keeps living in the world and cannot avoid having his life also in the external, and consequently the possibility of losing oneself in the world is always present. One means to deal with the problem might be the intensive practice of religious devotion, perhaps even in a monastery, but according to Climacus this is not the correct response to the human situation. The religious person should not try to spend his whole life within the walls of a church or a monastery, rather, his task is to make his home into a shrine. Not only during the sermon, but also in his everyday life he should base his existence in God and remember that a human being is himself capable of nothing. But how can one live an ordinary human life with this thought constantly in one’s mind

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645 CUP, 454 / SVI VII, 395.
646 See Pinomaa 1940.
and with religious suffering in one's inwardness? One is, of course, not to take part in any vicious or criminal activities, but how is one able to take part in the many other activities of the world that are often frivolous and childish, and even at their best still just finite and temporary? Having died to immediacy, having lost the relativity of immediacy, the religious person should now be able to join the God-conception together with any incidental finitude. Terrible trials now lie ahead: with the help of God he should be able, for example, to go to the amusement park in Dyrehaven and to enjoy himself there.\textsuperscript{650}

As Climacus' extensive discussion on the Dyrehaven trip shows, such frivolous activities become infinitely difficult to pursue in an intimate relation with God. Before entering the park the religious individual fortifies himself with the thought that God, who has created man, knows the nature of man, knows all his desires and needs, and among them "the necessity of diversion, of rest, and a night's sleep."\textsuperscript{651} But then arises the question that we encountered already in the "Ultimatum" of \textit{Either/Or}: how can an individual tell where "the boundary between what is lack of will and what is lack of ability; what is indolence and earthly selfishness and what is the limitation of finitude" lies?\textsuperscript{652} Within himself, the existing individual cannot tell; he does not know himself as well as God knows him. But in \textit{humility} before God he appeals to the absolute difference that is between God and man: a human being is temporal and cannot endure in temporality an uninterrupted spiritual life of eternity, but needs diversion. Between the humble diversion in the amusement park and the desperate effort in the monastery, then, he chooses amusement, because in his humbleness he does not dare to choose monastery. And in the amusement park he also does his best to enjoy himself, because

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\textsuperscript{650} \textit{CUP}, 471–486 / \textit{SV} VII, 410–423.  \\
\textsuperscript{651} \textit{CUP}, 489 / \textit{SV} VII, 425.  \\
\textsuperscript{652} \textit{CUP}, 490 / \textit{SV} VII, 426.
\end{flushright}
“the humblest expression for the relationship with God is to acknowledge one’s humanness, and it is human to enjoy oneself.”\textsuperscript{653} However, even if in his humble self-consciousness the religious person knows that now and then he needs diversion, he has still some difficulties in deciding when the time has arrived that it is absolutely necessary for him to enjoy himself in Dyrehaven. He must ascertain “that it is not a momentary inclination, a fancy of immediacy, that determines him.” After he has overcome this doubt, he is finally ready to take the trip to the fairground, and now the ethical consideration that there has to be continuity and consequence in life will back him up and guarantee that he does not turn back half way. Climacus writes: “[I]n the face of a decision made after honest deliberation, a fleeting thought must not play lord and master,” and “when worst comes to worst it is worse to become maundering than with decisiveness to carry out what has been decided.”\textsuperscript{654} In the end the religious individual, this knight of hidden inwardness, goes to Dyrehaven and enjoys himself there, as it seems, just like all the other merry residents of Copenhagen.

We remember how in Either/Or, Part II, the ethical choice made in front of the eternal power was followed by the movement of repentance, and then the concrete actualization of the universal ideal followed. Here in the Dyrehaven passage of Postscript we may discern a similar dialectical movement from the passionate ethical God-relationship through suffering self-examination into actualization of the universal. But although the religious person returns to the world and takes part in ordinary life just as the ethical person does, the contradiction between the eternal realm of God and the transient realm of finite human activities remains unresolved in his inwardness. While the ethical demands every human being

\textsuperscript{653} CUP, 490–493 / SVI VII, 426–429.
\textsuperscript{654} CUP, 495–497 / SVI VII, 430–432.
to become open, religiousness is hidden inwardness that follows after the ethical, claims Climacus.\footnote{CUP, 499–500 n / SV1 VII, 434 n.}

The comical contradiction in this is that with all the hidden inwardness and with the “pregnancy of suffering and benediction in his inner being” the religious knight of hidden inwardness almost looks like an ordinary human being. Ideally, the religious individual essentially tries to keep his inner suffering to himself, since he has good reasons not to share his sufferings with others.\footnote{One reason seems to be that if the suffering is due to one’s personal relation to an eternal happiness and to God, no other human being may cure it and to share one’s suffering with others would be meaningless. It could be considered also unethical, a kind of disloyalty to and mutiny against God. Moreover, by expressing his personal pain for example in the middle of an amusement park the person would spoil the childish and innocent joy of his fellow beings. From the point of view of Climacus such action would mean the breakdown of ethical striving that is based on a personal God-relationship.} However, according to Climacus, the religious person will not succeed in hiding his inwardness completely in concrete existence. Therefore, “he will not express it directly,” but “hinder it negatively with the aid of the humorous.”\footnote{CUP, 499–501 / SV1 VII, 434–435.} As irony was the incognito of the ethical person, humor is the incognito of the religious person.

According to Climacus, humor lies in the equilibrium between the comic and the tragic.\footnote{CUP, 292 / SV1 VII, 249.} The religious person understands the humorous aspect of his existence, but all the same keeps hold of his inward suffering and passion. Just as the ethical earnestness masters irony without denying the validity of its point of view, so religious earnestness masters humor. Reflecting his everyday existence the religious person is aware that from the point of view of the eternal his painstaking religious striving in temporality, which does not bring him a hair’s breadth closer to the eternal, is comic.
In his civilized communication with others, then, he assumes a humorous attitude toward his personal exertion. As an existing individual, however, he remains at the same time in his pathos-filled striving.\(^659\) Namely, he knows that even if his striving falls short from the eternal, it does not actually fall prey to the comic, for the striving is, indeed, the appropriate response to the negativity in existence.\(^660\) Similarly, according to Climacus, repentance is at the bottom immune to the comic, because it is higher than every comical observation that leaves the problems of actual existence unsolved. Repentance does contain a contradiction: a corrupted person, who feels that he has a disposition to all evil,\(^661\) attempts to abolish the evil by himself. But this contradiction is not just to be laughed at by someone, who cannot solve the contradiction himself. The actual contradiction is not solved by regarding it in a comical light. It points towards something that an existing individual should take in earnest, i.e. towards sin and the redemption of sin in Christ.\(^662\)

According to Climacus, the closest approximation to the consciousness of sin within immanent religiousness is the consciousness of the totality of guilt, which arises in the individual when he joins some particular guilt of his together with his personal relation to an eternal happiness and God. Actually, it seems to be the ethical that demands this “joining together” for, according to Climacus, it would be unethical to make some finite, relative instance (for example, the police court or “the urban rabble”) as the instance that abolishes human guilt.\(^663\) Guilt-consciousness differs

\(^{659}\) I have here interpreted the religious existence in the light of what Climacus writes about the contemporaneity of the comic and the tragic in the existing subjective thinker. See CUP, 87 and 89–92 / SVI VII, 68 and 70–72.

\(^{660}\) Cf. CUP, 85 / SVI VII, 66.

\(^{661}\) Cf. CUP, 161 / SVI VII, 132–133.

\(^{662}\) See CUP, 518–519 and 524 / SVI VII, 453 and 457.

\(^{663}\) CUP, 529–530 / SVI VII, 462.
from sin-consciousness in that in the former it is the individual himself that joins his guilt together with the conception of God, but in the latter it is “the god in time” that makes the individual conscious of his sin. What is common to both, however, is the totality of the quality in question: because the individual relates his guilt to God, he conceives it as total, and in this respect, in its totality, the consciousness of guilt is like the consciousness of sin. Related in the religious inwardness to the eternal, guilt becomes a “totality-category,” that is, a category that covers an individual’s existence in its totality.

The religious person, thus, comes to regard himself as essentially and totally guilty. His existence becomes characterized by “the eternal recollecting of guilt” and by the “essential continuance” of guilt-consciousness. Climacus writes that the constancy of the individual’s pathos-filled relation to an eternal happiness expresses itself in “recollection’s eternal storing up of guilt” and no

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665 CUP, 537–538 / SV1 VII, 468–469. One could also put the matter the other way round: for such a grand but good being as God, a single transgression of an insignificant and weak creature, such as a single individual, certainly should not matter that much. This would perhaps be, what Climacus would term the “humorous” point of view into the human guilt. If I have understood correctly, the point of Climacus is that an existing human being cannot really assume such a point of view toward his own guilt: that would be a lèse-majesté against God. However, toward the guilt of other individuals Climacus does recommend such a lofty attitude. He writes: “[I] believe it would be appropriate discourse for a truly religious person if he said: I do not doubt anyone’s salvation; the only one I have fears about is myself; even if I see a person sink low, I still dare not despair of his salvation, but if it is myself, then I certainly would be forced to endure the terrible thought. An authentic religious individuality is always lenient with others, so inventive in thinking up excuses; only toward himself is he cold and severe like a grand-inquisitor. With others, he is as a kindly old man usually is with a young person; only with regard to himself is he old and uncompromising. (CUP, 389 n / SV1 VII, 337 n.)”
666 CUP, 533 / SV1 VII, 465.
pance may give an adequate satisfaction for the guilt held onto in hidden inwardness.\textsuperscript{667} Neither does the consciousness of guilt allow itself to be externalized, finitized, or temporalized. Climacus writes:

\begin{quote}
[I]t is deeply rooted in human nature that guilt requires punishment. How natural, then, to think up something by oneself, a toilsome task, perhaps, even if it is dialectically in such a way that it can possibly benefit others, charity to the needy, denying oneself a wish, etc. Is this ludicrous? I find it childlike and beautiful. Yet this is indeed analogous to self-inflicted penance, but, however well intentioned it is, it still makes guilt finite.\textsuperscript{668}
\end{quote}

So although the sense of total guilt originally arises from trespasses acted out in the temporal and finite existence, so that the individual eternalizes and infinitizes his guilt by relating it to God in his inwardness, having done that the individual cannot now make up for his eternal guilt by good works in temporality and finitude. Instead, he must keep recollecting his guilt forever, since this is “the most rigorous punishment,”\textsuperscript{669} and as such a proper correlate, not to the finite trespasses, but to the infinite striving toward an eternal happiness.

However, the eternal recollection of guilt does not imply that the religious person gives up doing good works on the earth. As an ethical person he is indeed eternally bound to realize the universal. Climacus writes that while the ethical existence is characterized as self-assertion, as struggle and victory, the existence in Religious-ness is characterized as suffering and “self-annihilation before God.”\textsuperscript{670}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{667} CUP, 535 and 538–539 / SV I VII, 466–467 and 469–470. \\
\textsuperscript{668} CUP, 549–550 / SV I VII, 479. \\
\textsuperscript{669} CUP, 550 / SV I VII, 479. \\
\textsuperscript{670} CUP, 288 and 572 / SV I VII, 338 and 498.
\end{flushleft}
iousness A comprehends contradiction [in existing, i.e. the contradiction between temporality and eternity, between here and hereafter] as suffering in self-annihilation, yet within immanence; but, ethically accentuating existing, it hinders the existing person in abstractly remaining in immanence or in becoming abstract by wanting to remain in immanence." In other words, the subject should be able to return from his suffering, guilt-dominated inwardness back to the active existence in the changeable world.

But as the example of the Dyrehaven trip shows, in practice this might not be easy: a “thorn in the flesh” may make the performing of some ordinary human activities in the world extremely difficult and complicated. When one resigns the finite and relative for the sake of the infinite and absolute, “the roots are cut,” everything is changed, and the knight of infinite resignation becomes a stranger in the world. In Fear and Trembling (Frygt og Beven, 1843) Johannes de silentio claims that when such a knight tries to return to the finite existence, there is always something in his movements that betrays him being an alien in the world. Johannes Climacus seems to agree on this with his namesake, when he writes that the religious person must have recourse to humor in order to hide the suffering and the consciousness of guilt that follows the movement of infinity.

The question is, is an individual still able to realize the universal and reveal himself ethically with humor as his incognito after he has been marked by religious suffering and total guilt? Judge William would say that, if one cannot overcome one’s guilt ethically, humor is of no help. For example, in Either/Or he maintains that “it is the duty for every person to marry,” in the sense that the

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671 CUP, 572–573 / SVI VII, 499.
672 CUP, 410 / SVI VII, 356.
673 FT, 41 / SVI III, 91–92.
person who marries “fulfills the universal.” All the same he writes to the melancholic young friend of his: “If the history of your inner life has initiated you into secrets—in short, if in some way or another you have swallowed a secret that cannot be dragged out of you without costing your life—then never marry.”

On the other hand, Climacus suggests that there are difficulties involved in marriage that the judge keeps silent about. He asks: “What is the midpoint that marriage expresses between the spiritual and the psycho-somatic? In what way is it not an impediment? How is it, spiritually understood, a blessing...?” Climacus suspects that in marital bliss the spirit in him might be obscured. Climacus does not want to bereave ordinary, simple people of their earthly bliss, but he assumes “that the judge [i.e. Judge William], provided I can get hold of him, if I whisper a little secret in his ear, will admit that difficulties remain.” The argumentation of Climacus is not quite up to the scientific standards of openness, explicitness, and transparency here, and it is hard to read the whispering lips or the heart of Climacus. Anyway, we may conjecture that in his view marital bliss may be at least as difficult to unite with religious suffering and guilt as the Dyrehaven bliss is. And Climacus considers already the latter as a superhuman achievement out of his reach. He writes: “I admire the inner achievement of religiousness, admire it as the greatest marvel, but also frankly admit that I do not succeed in being able from and with the highest conception of God and his eternal happiness, to enjoy myself in the amusement park.” The personal choices of our existing humorist confirm that at least for him fulfilling Judge William’s ethical universal has turned out to be difficult: Climacus

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675 EO2, 245 / SV1 II, 220.
676 EO2, 117 / SV1 II, 106.
677 CUP, 180 / SV1 VII, 149.
is apparently a bachelor and the calling that he has chosen, “to make difficulties everywhere,” cannot exactly be considered as a standard ethical way of realizing the universal.\footnote{See \textit{PF}, 7 / \textit{SVI} IV, 177 and \textit{CUP}, 186–187 / \textit{SVI} VII, 155.}

Thus, even if the ethical task of fulfilling the universal is not forgotten in the religious sphere of existence, the “backward movement” that the religious individual in \textit{Postscript} makes back into his inwardness does not seem to return him to the historical world as repentance did in the life-view of Judge William, but rather makes such a return difficult, perhaps even impossible. The task “simultaneously to relate oneself absolutely to the absolute telos and relatively to relative ends” already makes the existence difficult enough in the world of relativities. Then follows the task of dying to immediacy and the inward suffering that it implies. Finally, guilt-consciousness encompasses the subject in itself.\footnote{\textit{CUP}, 525–526 / \textit{SVI} VII, 458–459.} The subject is thereby doomed to live the rest of his life in the hiddenness of inward suffering and guilt. From the point of view of the active ethical life this development must be regarded as unhealthy, and it is quite understandable that Judge William warns against it in \textit{Stages on Life’s Way}.\footnote{\textit{SLW}, 169–183 / \textit{SVI} VI, 161–173.} On the other hand, the positive in Religiousness \(A\), that for Climacus makes up all its negativity, is that existing in it the individual feels he is as close to the eternal as possible. In his passionate inwardness the individual relates himself to the eternal and, as Climacus says it so beautifully:

...what are those people compared with the god; what is the refreshment of their busy clanging compared with the deliciousness of that solitary well-spring that is in every human being, that wellspring in which the god resides, that wellspring in the profound silence when all is quiet! And, com-
pared with eternity, what else than a brief moment is the hour and a half of
time I have to live with human beings?683

The quotation above expresses the mystical and “speculative”
character of Religiousness $A$. Climacus writes that the eternal may
be reached by recollecting backward in speculation, but in exis-
tence the eternal appears always as the future (det Tilkom-
mende).684 As stated above, Religiousness $A$ ethically accentuates
the task of existing and thereby keeps the existing person from
remaining in the immanence of the eternal.685 Religiousness $A$
epects the individual not to forsake temporal existence, but to
remain in it. In this, Religiousness $A$ differs from the Hegelian
speculation, which ignores existence and abstains from ethics.
Climacus writes: “For speculation, existence has vanished and only
pure being is; for Religiousness $A$, only the actuality of existence
is...” However, although Religiousness $A$ is not speculation, ac-
cording to Climacus, it is nevertheless “speculative.” It is specula-
tively conscious of the eternal, which “in the underlying imma-
nence” sustains the whole of existence, continually hidden by the
actuality of existence, but yet is present in it everywhere and no-
where.686

The use of the term “speculative” here demands some clarifica-
tion. Climacus seems to refer by the term here to the attempt to
apprehend, in an immanent way, i.e. through the negativity of our
finite and temporal existence, the positivity of the infinite and
eternal that lies as its basis. The “speculative” idea that informs
Religiousness $A$ seems to be that the negativity of the finite and
temporal refers to the positivity of the infinity and eternal. Magis-
ter Kierkegaard uses the term “speculative” in this sense, when he

683 CUP, 183 / SV I, 152.
684 CUP, 306 and 424 / SV I, 262 and 368.
685 CUP, 572–573 / SV I, 499.
describes the Socratic ignorance in *The Concept of Irony*. Kierkegaard writes that Socrates knew that at the ground of all being there lies the eternal, the divine, but he did not know what it was.\textsuperscript{687} This ignorance of the ground of all being Socrates assumed to be universal, common to all men, and an awareness of it he considered as wisdom. Consequently, he went on propagating the awareness among his contemporaries. This was his divine call, which kept him from “a speculative absorption in the remotely intimated positivity behind this ignorance.”\textsuperscript{688} However, explains Kierkegaard, even his ignorance had a “speculative” character in that it concerned the eternal ground of all being, and it was precisely this speculative character that enabled him to transcend the realm of phenomena and to interrogate his contemporaries:

For him, the negativity implicit in his ignorance was...the speculative element in the idea, whereby he had infinitely circumnavigated existence, was the divine authority by virtue of which he practiced in the realm of the particular. This ignorance was the eternal victory over the phenomenon, which no particular phenomenon or the sum of all phenomena could rest from him, but by virtue of it he triumphed over the phenomenon at every moment.\textsuperscript{689}

In other words, the ignorance and the maieutic practice of Socrates were in effect informed by what we could term a *minimal speculative consciousness*: a consciousness of the unknown eternal and infinite ground of all being. Such speculative consciousness also characterized Socrates' conception of ethics. According to Kierkegaard, the thought that all virtue is one is “speculative” in that it signifies “the negative infinity in which each particular virtue is free.” The thought that virtue cannot be taught is likewise

\textsuperscript{687} *CI*, 169 / *SV I* XIII, 253.
\textsuperscript{688} *CI*, 173 / *SV I* XIII, 256.
\textsuperscript{689} *CI*, 175–176 / *SV I* XIII, 258.
“speculative” since it refers to “the eternal self-positing infinity in which all learning is encompassed.”

Similar minimal speculative consciousness seems to form the ground of Religiousness $A$: existence is characterized by negativity, but as the background and presupposition of this negativity an immanent positivity is recollected. Beneath his negativity the suffering knight of hidden inwardness anticipates the positive that builds him up. Climacus writes:

The upbuilding element in the sphere of Religiousness $A$ is that of immanence, is the annihilation in which the individual sets himself aside in order to find God, since it is the individual himself who is the hindrance. Here the upbuilding is quite properly distinguishable by the negative, by the self-annihilation that finds the relationship with God within itself, that suffering-through sinks into the relationship with God within itself, finds its ground within it, because God is in the ground only when everything that is in the way is cleared out, every finitude, and first and foremost the individual himself in his finitude, in his cavilling against God.

It is the love for God, the passion for the divine ground, that as if burns away the temporal existence. Even if Religiousness $A$ accentuates existence, in existence the moment of time eventually has no essential significance, but is “swallowed by the eternal.” Exist ing is at bottom just “an element within [the individual’s] eternal consciousness” and each individual is “essentially structured equally eternally and essentially related to the eternal.”

Since the temporal is the vanishing element in each individual’s life, despite all its negativity Religiousness $A$ implies in the end an extremely optimistic view of life. It assumes that “every human being, viewed essentially, participates in this eternal happiness and

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690 CI, 208–209 / SV1 XIII, 288.
692 CUP, 573 / SV1 VII, 499–500.
finally becomes eternally happy.” Consequently, “the difference between the religious person and the person who does not religiously transform his existence becomes a humorous difference: that whereas the religious person utilizes his entire life in becoming aware of the relation to an eternal happiness and the other does not concern himself with it...they both, viewed eternally, go equally far.”

Here we again run into humor, which escorts the religious like irony escorts the ethical. According to Climacus, humor is not just an incognito of religiousness, but it may also be an independent stage of existence. Let us now look at what humorous existence is like.

According to Climacus, humor is “the confinium of the religious” and as such it is “very comprehensive [meget omfat-tende].” In other words, humor comprehends the whole realm of religiousness. Like the religious person, the existing humorist “continually joins the conception of God together with something else and brings out the contradiction.” He has an essential conception of the suffering in which he is, he “comprehends [fatter] the meaning of suffering as inherent is existing.”

Humor also comprehends the totality of the guilt-consciousness. Therefore, there is hidden pain and sympathy in humor, whereas irony, which still drives at the ethical self-assertion without acknowledging the fundamental helplessness of human beings, lacks sympathy for religious suffering.

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694 CUP, 451 / SV I VII, 392.
695 CUP, 505 / SV I VII, 439.
696 CUP, 447 / SV I VII, 389.
697 CUP, 449 / SV I VII, 391.
698 CUP, 550 / SV I VII, 480.

But, although comprehending the religious, humor is still not religiousness but only its confinium.\footnote{CUP, 500 / SV I VII, 434.} Intellectually, humor has the religious categories in its possession, but humorous existence is not possessed by religious passions.\footnote{CUP, 505 / SV I VII, 439–440.} In humor recollection dominates, and through recollection the humorist revokes existence.\footnote{Humor consists “in recollection’s withdrawal out of existence into the eternal.”\footnote{CUP, 291 / SV I VII, 249.} The humorist “hides himself away in recollection’s eternity behind [i Erindringens Evighed bag ved] and smiles sadly at temporal existence with its brief busyness and illusory decision.”\footnote{Humor and Religiousness A share the speculative consciousness of the contradiction between the temporal existence and the eternal that lies as its ground, but whereas the religious person is existing in this contradiction, the existing humorist hides itself in recollection’s eternity.\footnote{Frater Taciturnus, who is a humorist like Climacus, writes in Stages on Life’s View about this. According to Taciturnus, humor represents “a balance of spirit” in the unity of the comic and tragic (SLW, 486–487 / SV I VI, 452), but religious earnestness is “the higher passion proceeding from the unity of the comic and tragic (SLW, 440 / SV I VI, 410).”} Accordingly, humor may become the “transit point” for moving from the ethical to the religious existence\footnote{CUP, 179, 501–502 and 534–535 / SV I VII, 149, 436 and 466.} or “the last terminus a quo [point from which] in de-
fining Christianity," but humor is not religiousness and still less Christian religiousness.

The existing humorist merely knows the religious, but does not truly exist in it. In his thinking the humorist relates everything to God, but he does not enter into a relationship with God as an existing individual. Humor assumes that the eternal goal “lies behind.” Consequently, although the humorist comprehends the meaning of suffering inherent in existing, he “revokes it all, because the explanation lies behind.” Humor reflects upon “the totality of guilt-consciousness in the single individual before God in relation to an eternal happiness,” but without taking it in earnest it revokes it in jest. Humor is so far from Christianity that it is only “a pagan speculative thought that has come to know all the essentially Christian.” Humor cannot take seriously the idea that one moment of time has decisive significance for the individual’s eternal happiness. The humorist has always “ample time, because he has eternity’s amplitude of time behind him.” With a sad smile the humorist revokes all the futile striving in temporality. By contrast, Christianity is “the direction forward to becoming a Christian.” It has no room for sad recollections, but sees only “salvation or perdition—salvation ahead of it, perdition behind for everyone who turns around, whatever he sees.”

In Kierkegaard’s authorship it is always higher to exist than just to comprehend. Consequently, the humorist represents a lower
stage of existence than a religious person. At the same time he stands higher than such an ethical person who has not comprehended the depths of the religious spheres. It is worth noticing that although humor revokes the passionate existence in religious categories, it does not imply immorality. The humorist “honors the moral and for his part does everything as best he can,” but then again he smiles to himself sadly.

This double-movement is exemplified by Climacus, who as a humorist eventually shuns earnestness. In his book he describes the task of becoming a Christian, but in its “Appendix” he revokes

715 The reason why Climacus wanted to make it clear that humor stands below religious existence was, apparently, the view of his Hegelian contemporaries that humor stands higher than faith. Climacus writes: “In modern scholarship, humor has become the highest after faith. That is, faith is the immediate, and through speculative thought, which goes beyond faith, humor is reached. This is a general confusion in all systematic speculative thought insofar as it wants to take Christianity under its wing. (CUP, 291 / SV1 VII, 249.)” The reference seems to be to J. L. Heiberg and Hans Lassen Martensen (1808–1884); see SKS K7, 242–243.

716 Thus, in the hierarchy of existence-spheres humor is placed above the ethical (CUP, 501–502 and 531 n / SV1 VII, 436 and 464 n.1).

717 CUP, 271 n / SV1 VII, 229 n.

718 See, for example, CUP, 183–184 / SV1 VII, 152, where Climacus abruptly stops his religious outpourings (“woe unto me...”) by a humorous revocation: “This sounds almost like earnestness. If only I dared appeal to visions and revelations and to my being red in the face, many people would take it to be earnestness instead of assuming it to be congestion of blood.”
the book as superfluous. He writes that he publishes his book only as “an innocent pastime and amusement.” As a humorist he appreciates the “well-ordered state” that allows the private individual to pursue his private interests. In contrast to the “open-minded, liberal, and speculative” spokesmen who, backed up with torch-light processions, inaugurate a new era, Climacus praises the good old absolute monarchy as a protector of liberty and individual rights:

All praise to the well-ordered state; enviable blessing for the one who understands to appreciate it! How can anybody be so busy wanting to reform the state and to get the government changed! Of all forms of government the monarchical is the best, more than any other it favors and protects the private gentleman’s quiet fancies and innocent follies. Only democracy, the most tyrannical form of government, expects positive participation from everyone, about which the societies and general assemblies of our day are already reminding us often enough. Is this tyranny that one man wants to rule and so leave the rest of us free? No, but it is tyranny, that all want to rule and in addition to that would oblige everyone to take part in the government, even the person who most urgently declines to take part in the government.

Such words make good sense in the mouth of the humorist who “comprehends the totality of the guilt-consciousness,” knows himself as a corrupt man with “a disposition to all evil,” and longs back to the unemancipated state of childhood.

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719 CUP, 619 / SV1 VII, 539.
722 See CUP, 161 and 550 / SV1 VII, 133 and 480.
723 See CUP, 550–553 / SV1 VII, 480–482.
We have now gone through the immanent stages of existence outlined by Climacus. According to Climacus, there must be a break in immanence and a new beginning must be made in the historical actuality, if one is to move forward from here. In the following chapters we will investigate how this break takes place and how it resitutes the subject into the historical and social world. But before that, let us consider the different ways to situate oneself within immanent existence one more time.

The description of the ethical, religious, and humorous existence in Postscript aims at Christian existence: the growing isolation and guilt prepare the way for revelation and a new life in Christ. At the same time Climacus makes it clear that nothing forces the subject towards Christianity by way of necessity. There are no necessary transitions, there is no necessary progression—the ethical existence remains as possible for the subject as the humorous or religious.

Let us here again look for reasons and causes for the transitions as we did in the case of the ethical choice.\footnote{See subdivision 3.2.1 above.} We will first of all notice that there are no external reasons or causes that would necessitate the choice of one form of existence instead of another. The differences between the ethical, religious, and humorous existence are not explained by differences in the objective context of the subject; the context remains the same. Instead, the differences lie in how the individual situates himself: in how he relates, on the one hand, to the phenomenal world around him; on the other, to the eternal and infinite realm hidden beneath this world; and in how he artistically, freely, combines these two relations in his life. There might be some internal factors that direct the subject toward one option or other: a sense of ethical responsibility for the spouse and children favors the ethical, the passion for eternal happiness favors the religious, and a lack of religious earnestness favors
the humorous existence. But these factors, and the weight and significance they receive for the individual, again depend on how the subject situates himself: it is up to the subject whether he concentrates on his ethical duties in the world, whether he lets the passion for an eternal happiness dominate his life, or whether he seeks an exit in humorous contemplation.

Thus, it seems that the way the subject situates himself is open for the Climacean subject in a similar way as it was later for the existentialists like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty: it is necessary that the subject situates himself this way or that, it is not necessary that he situates himself this way rather than that. However, in contrast to the existentialists, the Climacean subjects situate themselves in historical actuality in accordance with the ideal of living poetically outlined by Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Irony*. Above I have already argued this with regard to the ethical existence; it remains to also point out the presence of the ideal in religious and humorous existence.

According to the Kierkegaardian ideal of living poetically, the individual “lets himself be poetically composed.” The individual is brought up by the divine, while he exists ethical-religiously in the world. The passivity of being brought up and the idea that this upbringing takes place while one exists in the world are implied in the suffering and self-annihilation of the religious individual. His suffering derives from the fact that he exists in the world and has his life already invested in the relativities of the finitude: his task is to renounce within himself relative ends and to become dead to immediacy, and this involves suffering. However, he must not attempt to escape the world in which he is situated. According to Climacus, the religious individual “does not leave the world but remains in it,” but “before God he inwardly deepens his outward activity by acknowledging that he is capable of nothing...even

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725 *CUP, 431–432 and 526 / SVI VII, 374–375 and 458.*
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though he still works to the utmost of his ability—and precisely this is his enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{726} The religious person believes that whatever happens, it is in the hand of God, but that his task is to concentrate in what always pleases God, “the highest goods, peace of soul, his soul’s salvation.”\textsuperscript{727} Thus the individual continually seeks the upbuilding relationship with God, while he exists where he is meant to exist. Through self-annihilation he attempts to set himself aside in order to find God within himself. “Suffering-through” he tries to “sink into the relationship with God” and to find his ground in God.\textsuperscript{728}

In this way the individual, who exists in the sphere of Religiousness \textit{A}, “lets himself be poetically composed.” The art of existence consists here in opening oneself to the eternal and infinite in one’s inwardness, while at the same time living an ordinary life in the actual world. From Kierkegaard’s \textit{upbuilding discourses} we get a picture of what is involved in this art: cherishing ethical and religious passions in one’s heart, entertaining eternal ideas in one’s thought, becoming conscious of concrete situations, and weighing alternative possibilities in one’s imagination.\textsuperscript{729} Even though

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\footnote{\textit{CUP}, 506 / \textit{SV} VII, 440.}

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\footnote{\textit{CUP}, 506–507 / \textit{SV} VII, 440–441.}

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\footnote{\textit{CUP}, 560–561 / \textit{SV} VII, 489.}

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\footnote{It is worth noting here that the upbuilding discourses address themselves to subjects that are situated in the concrete, temporal world. Consider, for example, the “Preface” of the first \textit{Two Upbuilding Discourses} (1843), where Kierkegaard imaginatively describes the journey of his published book to “that single individual” out into the world: “Inasmuch as in being published it is in a figurative sense starting a journey, I let my eyes follow it for a little while. I saw how it wended its way down solitary paths or walked solitary on public roads. After a few little mistakes, through being deceived by a fleeting resemblance, it finally met that single individual whom I with joy and gratitude call \textit{my reader}, that single individual it is seeking, to whom, so to speak, it stretches out its arms, that single individual who is favorably enough disposed to allow himself to be found, favorably enough disposed to receive it, whether at the time of the en-
there might be no conspicuous difference between a man of common sense and a religious individual in the external life-conduct, in their inwardness there is an infinite difference: the difference between calculating rationality and divine madness; between finite understanding that aims at worldly success and infinite passion that aims at an eternal happiness.

In Religiousness A the task to exist ethically remains, but at the same time the religious person falls short of at least one central ethical ideal: he is unable to become open in the world and to express his relation to the eternal. On the other hand, he falls short of his religious ideal: he is unable to relate absolutely to the eternal happiness and God. Thus, we may assume that the religious person would be receptive to something that would break the “immanence” of his existence and establish a relation to the eternal happiness and God in the historical world. As long as the immanence of his existence is not broken from outside, as long as God does not come to his help, there is no way the religious individual could move forward. His ethical-religious striving ends in guilt and both the ethical and the religious ideal remain beyond his reach.

While remaining in the state of immanence, the religious individual is aware of the eternal that lies “behind” (bag ved) him, and on the basis of this speculative consciousness he expects that, after the temporal existence is over, what was before and what will always be, that is, the eternal realm of God, will return and the transgressions and guilt of human beings will be eternally abolished. However, while existing, the religious person concentrates...
on the task of existing and consequently gives up his speculative assurance. In this he differs from the speculative philosopher, who ignores existence,\textsuperscript{730} but also from the humorist, who abstains from religious existence.

If the harmonious way of living poetically that we encountered in \textit{Either/Or}, Part II, becomes problematic in the immanent religious existence of \textit{Postscript}, in the humorous existence it breaks asunder. The humorous individual does situate himself in terms of drama: in the light of his eternal consciousness he sees his life simultaneously as comic and tragic. However, he no longer believes that he is being brought up and that there is continuity in his life. The humorous individual has given up the hope that he could develop towards the eternal in time. When it comes to his relation to the historical and social actuality, in a sense it holds true of the humorist that he does have a definite given context into which he wants to fit: the well-ordered state. Consequently, he “does not become a word without meaning because it is wrenched out of its associations.”\textsuperscript{731} However, what his life expresses is that there are unsolvable difficulties in our ethical-religious striving and that, without the prerequisites for solving them, all striving in time is futile. The humorist has no viewpoint that would give meaning to ethical-religious striving and he sees no meaningful way, and no reason, to get positively involved in the historical and social actuality. Hence, with a certain sadness, we may assume he takes it as his task “to make difficulties everywhere.”\textsuperscript{732}

Here the project of “living poetically” seems to arrive at a sad end. However, it is good to remember that even for Climacus himself humor is just an intermediary stage of existence. According to Climacus, the individual may move from humor either to Religiousness \textit{A} or Religiousness \textit{B}: on the one hand, humor is said to

\textsuperscript{730} CUP, 570–571 / \textit{SV} \textit{VII}, 497–498.
\textsuperscript{731} CI, 283 / \textit{SV} \textit{XIII}, 354.
\textsuperscript{732} CUP, 186–187 / \textit{SV} \textit{VII}, 155.
be the *confinium* between the ethical and the religious, on the other, it is referred to as “the final *terminus a quo* in relation to the Christian-religious.” In Kierkegaard’s authorship the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* was apparently meant to prepare the way for actual Christian existence. Kierkegaard’s intention was to conclude his pseudonymous authorship with this work. The dialectical move that was to follow the position of humor was a leap into religious actuality: Kierkegaard was planning to qualify himself for ordination and to become a pastor in a rural parish. Thus, while writing the humorous *Postscript* to his authorship, the ideal of finding one’s place in historical and social actuality remained valid for Kierkegaard himself. The detached position assumed by the pseudonym Climacus does not imply that Kierkegaard himself had given up the project of “living poetically” in the given historical context.

733 *CUP*, 502 and 291 / *SV* VII, 436 and 249. — The difficulty of “locating” humor has been discussed by Evans 1983, 195–201, and by Walsh 1994, 212–213. Walsh refers further to Schousboe 1925. Personally, I see no real difficulty here. As a *confinium* humor is just “very comprehensive”: it may know both Religiousness A and B and thus form the basis for existing in either of the two. At the same time it is on the lower level than both of them, for it only comprehends, and existing is always higher than just comprehending.

734 See *JP* 5, 5873 and 5966 / *Pap* VII 1 A 4 and 229.
5 The Concept of Anxiety and Philosophical Fragments

In Postscript, in the appendix to Chapter 2.II.2 entitled “A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature,” Climacus explains the main ideas of the pseudonymous authorship that had led to his Philosophical Fragments and Postscript. By following the glance of Climacus we see how someone, who has reached the existential sphere of humor, views the ethical-religious existence behind him and the Christian existence ahead of him.

Climacus reviews first Either/Or, which according to his formulation “has the existence-relation between the esthetic and the ethical materialize into existence in the existing individuality.”735 While Part I of Either/Or explores the cleft between the brilliant outward splendor of the aesthetic existence and the pain and despair in its hidden inwardness, in Part II an ethical attempt is made to overcome despair and to become open before God and men.736 The humorist Climacus, however, who regards suffering and guilt as essential ingredients of existence and who is interested in showing how difficult it is to become a Christian, claims that there is also a hidden discrepancy (Misligheden) in Judge William’s harmonious ethical life-view: “The discrepancy is that the ethical self is supposed to be found immanently in despair, that by enduring the despair the individual would win himself [vandt sig selv].”737 Against this approach from the judge, Climacus argues

735 CUP, 252 / SV VII, 212.
737 CUP, 258 / SV VII, 218.
that an individual needs help from God if he is to overcome the negativity of his total despair:

In despairing, I use myself to despair, and therefore I can indeed despair of everything by myself, but if I do this I cannot come back by myself. It is in this moment of decision [Afgjørelsens Øieblik] that the individual needs divine assistance, although it is quite correct that one must first have understood the existence-relation between the esthetic and the ethical in order to be in this point—that is, by being there in passion and inwardness, one indeed becomes aware of the religious—and of the leap.\textsuperscript{738}

The argument of Climacus seems to be as follows: Either the individual does not give himself totally to despair, in which case he will never become completely transparent to himself and never gain certainty that he has overcome his corrupt self; or the individual despair in earnest of his whole being and in that case he falls totally in despair and cannot find the positive in himself anymore. Climacus claims that the individual, who has lost himself in despair, cannot find himself in the despair itself, by despairing \textit{uno tenore} (in one breath, without interruption).\textsuperscript{739} In the decisive moment, in the moment when the individual is to regain himself, he needs help from God and there must be a “leap”; in order to overcome his given negativity there must be a break of immanence.

According to Climacus, the following pseudonymous works point this out. He writes that in \textit{Fear and Trembling} (\textit{Frygt og Bæven}, 1843), “the relation with God has come into existence; the immanence of the ethical despair \textit{has been broken}; the leap has been posited; the absurd is the notification.”\textsuperscript{740} The book describes the knight of faith, Abraham, who in his transient existence relates to

\textsuperscript{738} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{739} \textit{CUP}, 257 / \textit{SV1} VII, 217.
\textsuperscript{740} \textit{CUP}, 262 / \textit{SV1} VII, 222.
God as a single individual. Abraham believes that God speaks to him and gives him particular orders that he should follow in his life; most dramatically the order to sacrifice his only son, which is in obvious contradiction with universal ethical law. According to Climacus, such a leap that belongs to faith (the individual bases his relation to the eternal on something temporal) breaks the immanent movement of the ethical despair, through which Judge William sought the eternal immanently within himself. For human understanding, however, such a leap is absurd, for if the person, who makes the religious leap, is supposed to be the paradigm, then irregularity becomes the paradigm. Climacus explains:

\[\text{T]he religious paradigm does not express the universal but the singular (the particular, for example, by appealing to visions, dreams, etc.) and yet is supposed to be the paradigm. But to be the paradigm means to be for all, but one can be the prototype for all only by being what all are or ought to be, that is, the universal, and yet the religious paradigm is the very opposite (the irregular and the particular)…}^{741}

For an ethical person this is an absurd consequence that he cannot understand. However, if the ethical individual does not secretly believe that, even if he is in many respects imperfect and liable to err, fundamentally he is in the truth, in the good, and in freedom, but really despairs of himself in earnest, then his only hope is to believe that he will receive help from God in time. In other words, his only hope is in the absurd leap that would restore his freedom and bring him back to the side of the truth and good. According to Climacus, this is the message of the book \textit{Repetition (Gjentagelsen, 1843)}. According to Climacus, this book illustrates that if repetition “is to come into existence it must be a new immediacy, so that it is itself a movement \textit{by virtue of the absurd}.^{742}
In drafts of a letter to Johan Ludvig Heiberg, the pseudonymous author of the book, Constantin Constantius explains that the repetition his book really was about is the repetition of individual freedom. According to Constantius, freedom has its history not only in the history of the world, but also in the life of an individual. In individual history freedom passes through several stages in order to attain itself. Freedom, writes Constantius, is first qualified as desire (Lyst), and second as sagacity (Klogskab). Third, and last, freedom is qualified in relation to itself. Here the supreme interest of freedom is to bring about repetition and the question is: is repetition possible, can freedom take itself back again? In the book Repetition both the desiring Young Man, whom Constantius experiments with, and the sagacious Constantin Constantius himself despair of the possibility of repetition. According to Constantius, the point of his book was that the repetition of freedom is possible only as a transcendent, religious movement by virtue of the absurd. Completely developed his concept of repetition comes thus to signify reconciliation (Forsoningen).

The explanation that Constantin Constantius gives of the idea behind his book and his reference to reconciliation are in harmony with the interpretation Climacus gives of Repetition and the other pseudonymous works. As Climacus interprets them, the pseudonymous works pave the road from the ethical-religious existence of Either/Or to his own Philosophical Fragments (Philosophiske Smuler, 1844), which places Christianity into relation to what it means to exist.

746 CUP, 269 and 274 / SV1 VII, 228 and 232.
took as their theme: the leap that is involved in the true repetition of freedom. To comprehend what takes place in this movement by virtue of the absurd, Climacus refers us to his study on the moment of faith in *Philosophical Fragments*. However, to understand how the individual has fallen into a state in which a movement by virtue of the absurd is needed, he refers us first to *The Concept of Anxiety* (*Begrebet Angest*, 1844).

To be in need of a new beginning in time and to look for transcendent help, one must first despair in earnest of the possibility of the immanent repetition of freedom. Judge William believed that by despairing thoroughly and choosing himself in his eternal validity, the individual is able to make himself free and to base his life on the good and true. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, on the basis of Christian dogmatics and a careful analysis of the Biblical account of the fall in sin, Vigilius Haufniensis seeks to qualify the human inwardness so that the realization of the ethical universal becomes impossible for the human individual. As Climacus puts it, this dogmatic treatise on human psychology shows how in a state of sin, held in captivity by anxiety for sin, the individual finds himself “in a state exactly opposite to what the ethical requires,” and how the individual is, therefore, incapable of fulfilling the ethical requirement. Due to sin, there is a suspension from the ethical: the individual is exempted from realizing the ethical, because sin makes him heterogeneous with the ethical. At the same time the individual is cut away from the truth. “When truth is subjectivity, the inwardness of sin as anxiety in the existing individual is the greatest possible distance and the most painful distance from the truth,” writes Climacus.

Humor, the existential state that Climacus himself represents, falls short of both the leap of faith and the consciousness of sin.

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747 *CUP*, 267 / *SVI VII*, 226.
748 *CUP*, 269 / *SVI VII*, 228.
According to Climacus, the *Upbuilding Discourses* by Magister Kierkegaard, which had come out side by side with the pseudonymous works, exemplify this. These discourses go to the end the road that is open to human beings in their immediate existence. In the last discourses Climacus discerns “a carefully shaded touch of the humorous.” He notes that in this way what is arrived at in immanence ends: “The paradoxical expression of existence (that is, existing) as sin, the eternal truth as the paradox by having come into existence in time, in short, what is decisive for the Christian-religious, is not found in the upbuilding discourses...” Even when humor uses Christian categories, humor remains outside Christian existence. Climacus himself states that “at the point where the decision comes in the moment and the movement is forward toward the relation to the eternal truth that came into existence in time—at that point humor is not present.”

In this chapter we move forward and investigate the leap in Christian existence. We will follow the guidance of two laymen, Vigilius Haufniensis and Johannes Climacus, who approach issues that are bound to be left in the margins of science: sin, faith, and the paradox of the god existing in time. We shall once again especially keep an eye on the poetical and situational aspects of existence as we review first *The Concept of Anxiety* and then *Philosophical Fragments*. These works provide the key for understanding how the subject is resituated in historical and social actuality by the dramatic experiences central to Christianity. Therefore, we must investigate and analyze them with extra care.

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750 *CUP*, 272 / *SVI* VII, 231.
752 In studying *The Concept of Anxiety* I have been using the commentaries by Gregor Malantschuk and Arne Gron. *Malantschuk* 1971 is a carefully written recapitulation of the work by Vigilius. As will be seen in the following, however,
5.1 The Dramatic Experiences that Form the Basis of Dogmatics

5.1.1 Becoming Situated through Sin

In *Either/Or* Judge William delineates how the ethical choice of oneself takes place in the life of an individual. The judge describes how through despair the subject comes to choose himself in his eternal validity as free, as capable of making ethical choices; then, through repenting the sins of his and his fathers, he finds his place in the world and becomes integrated in the life of the race. In this way the difference between good and evil becomes concrete to the subject and in the life that follows he comes to affirm and actualize the good. As he does that, the good gains more and more force in him and he starts to see good and beauty everywhere. Now the fall in sin that Vigilius Haufniensis analyzes in Chapter I of *The Concept of Anxiety* appears to be a movement diametrically opposite to that of the ethical choice. Here the individual in co-operation with the obscure forces in him makes a decisive choice away from the good, and it is through this negative choice that he is situated in the concrete actuality. Judge William also recognizes that this kind of negative choice may take place. He writes in *Either/Or*:

> Already prior to one’s choosing, the personality is interested in the choice, and if one puts off the choice, the personality or the obscure forces within it unconsciously chooses. Then when a choice is even-

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my interpretation is in important respects at odds with that of Malantchuk. *Gron* 1993 is an insightful introduction actually to the whole of Kierkegaard’s authorship. In my eyes one merit of this lucid commentary is that it acknowledges the dimension of history and also the consideration of the contemporary age in *The Concept of Anxiety* (see *Gron* 1993, 113–117 and 150–156). In this respect my interpretation attempts to go further. To *Philosophical Fragments* I was introduced by the admirable introduction by Niels Thulstrup (*Thulstrup* 1962). In addition I have consulted *Roberts* 1986.
Actually made...one discovers that there is something that must be done
over again, must be withdrawn, and this is often very difficult. There
are stories about human beings whom mermaids or mermen have
subjected to their power with their demonic music. To break the
spell, so says the story, it was necessary for the person under the spell
to play the same piece backward without making a single mistake.
This is a very profound thought but very difficult to do, and yet this
is the way it is. The error one has absorbed has to be rooted out in
this way, and every time one makes a mistake one must begin all over
again.  

Using the Biblical account of the fall as his point of reference,
Vigilius Haufniensis analyzes the psychology of such a negative
choice that, according to the dogma of hereditary sin, makes it
(not only difficult, but) impossible for the human being to attain
the good and freedom on his own.

The psychological method that Vigilius uses might be called
the imaginative armchair method. Vigilius writes that he attempts
“to incline and bend himself to other people and imitate their
attitudes,” and that he observes the psychological phenomena by
imitating in himself “every mood, every psychic state that he dis-
covers in another.” But the method of Vigilius is not just de-
scriptive but diagnostic in that he investigates the psychical phe-
nomena in the light of ideas, or categories. With the “poetic
originality in his soul,” Vigilius creates out of the individual psy-
chical phenomena an idea of “the totality and invariable” that
informs the individual developments. In the light of this idea
Vigilius tries to carry the other “into the subsequent development,
which is his own creation by virtue of the idea.” He does this by

753 EO2, 164–165 / SV1 II, 149–150.
755 Arne Grøn has analyzed the diagnostic character of Kierkegaard’s psychology
756 CA, 55 / SV1 IV, 325.
inventing fictitiously the passion, the recognition of which has a therapeutic effect in the individual, so that “the individual will feel an indescribable relief and satisfaction” and will develop further. If the treatment does not prove to be successful, however, the failure in itself does not make the psychologist give up his theories. The reason might be “because of a defect in the operation, but it may also be because the individual is a poor example.”

Hence, just as with Freudian psychoanalysis, the psychological method of Vigilius clearly falls short of the scientific ideals of verification and falsification that the logical positivists and empiricists wanted to establish in the 20th century. But this is not only understandable, as Vigilius did not have the privilege to become acquainted with these ideals, it is also justifiable, since Vigilius does not consider human beings from a naturalistic point of view, but considers them as fundamentally free. As Vigilius makes clear in the “Introduction” of his work, his psychology is in the service of ethics and dogmatics and, therefore, he avoids considering the reactions of the human spirit as necessary consequences from the natural states of his soul.758 In his psychology Vigilius just tries to open up the concrete psychical possibilities that the free human spirits may act upon, and for this purpose his poetic and imaginative method is appropriate. He does not claim that the idea of “the totality and invariable,” that informs his psychological diagnosis,759 could ever be shown to correspond with some object of experience in such a way that it would become evident for any impartial observer of the phenomenon that this particular idea is the correct one. Quite the contrary, he openly admits that in his psychology he relies ultimately on a particular point of view: on dogmatics,

757 CA, 55–56 / SV1 IV, 326.
758 CA, 21–24 / SV1 IV, 293–296.
759 CA, 55 / SV1 IV, 325.
which has “heterogeneous originality”\textsuperscript{760} and which a human being may understand only on the basis of faith.\textsuperscript{761}

In subdivision 3.2.1 it was pointed out that the ethical choice in \textit{Either/Or} is an act of freedom and as such is inscrutable and unexplainable by the sciences, which build on necessity. Similarly, the first sin, through which sinfulness comes into the world, offends understanding; sin comes to the world by a sin, “by the fact that it is, it is presupposed.” According to Vigilius, sin is not determined by its accidental presuppositions, but comes into the world as the sudden, by a \textit{leap} that posits the \textit{quality}.\textsuperscript{762} Therefore, no immanent science can explain how sin comes into the world. However, this does not make sin less real for the free individual who has himself fallen into sin.\textsuperscript{763} In the fall a human being loses his innocence by his own guilt. According to Vigilius, ethics prohibits the science of psychology to explain this act of freedom, this “qualitative leap,” by the previous states of the individual so that these states would necessitate the fall.\textsuperscript{764} What, however, ethics allows psychology to do is to analyze the ambiguous state of anxiety from which, and in which, the qualitative leap takes place.\textsuperscript{765} Anxiety is “a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy,” an alien power which grips the individual, which the individual loves even if he fears it.\textsuperscript{766} An analysis of this preparatory state is useful for the understanding of the transition into sin.

In his analysis of the fall, Vigilius takes as his starting point the \textit{state of innocence}. He agrees with the account of Genesis that in-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{760} \textit{CA}, 19 / \textit{SV} IV, 292.
\item \textsuperscript{761} \textit{CA}, 18 n. / \textit{SV} IV, 290 n.
\item \textsuperscript{762} \textit{CA}, 32 / \textit{SV} IV, 304.
\item \textsuperscript{763} \textit{CA}, 51 / \textit{SV} IV, 321–322.
\item \textsuperscript{764} \textit{CA}, 35–37 / \textit{SV} IV, 306–309. See also \textit{CA}, 21–22 / \textit{SV} IV, 294.
\item \textsuperscript{765} \textit{CA}, 39 and 41 / \textit{SV} IV, 310–311 and 312.
\item \textsuperscript{766} \textit{CA}, 42–43 / \textit{SV} IV, 313–314.
\end{itemize}
nocence is ignorance. Vigilius writes that in the state of innocence man is not yet qualified as spirit—the spirit in him is still as if dreaming. But in this peaceful state a prohibition awakens in him anxiety about a possibility that is still a “nothing” for his unselfconscious spirit. This is the possibility of freedom, “the anxious possibility of being able.” In the Genesis narrative of the fall it is told that God prohibited Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge and that the prohibition was followed be a thread of punishment: “If you eat from this tree, you shall certainly die.” However, according to Vigilius, we may as well assume that the first man possessed these ideas in language. In his state of innocence Adam had the difference between good and evil in language; he just did not understand what it actually means, because the difference “is only for freedom.”

We may compare this anxious state that precedes the fall with the state that precedes the ethical choice. We may presume that also the individual described in Either/Or, who chooses himself in his eternal validity, has the ideas of good and evil in language and anticipates that he is capable of actualizing either of the two in his personal existence. Then the individual chooses himself in front of the eternal power as a free and concrete human being, with the consequence that the good and evil come to exist for him. Here, in the case of the negative choice, the distinction of good and evil and the thread of punishment connected to it function by contrast as a spell that makes the individual fall in sin. Facing this distinction the individual first dreads the possibility that he chooses wrongly. As the individual anticipates his possible guilt, anxiety takes possession of him. Then in the dizzy state of anxiety, he lays hold of the finiteness in order to support himself. In this way,

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767 CA, 37 / SV I IV, 309.
768 CA, 41 and 44 / SV I IV, 313 and 315.
769 CA, 45–46 / SV I IV, 316.
sinking in anxiety, he gives up his freedom and falls away from the good.\textsuperscript{771} According to Vigilius, the individual falls as possessed by anxiety. However, the free transition, the “qualitative leap,” still takes place since he gives himself up to anxiety out of free will. According to Vigilius, the individual “is guilty for he sank in anxiety, which he nevertheless loved even as he feared it.” Vigilius claims that it is ethics that demands such a judgment, for otherwise freedom, the cornerstone of ethical responsibility, would be lost in the fall by necessity and that is something that ethics could, of course, not accept.\textsuperscript{772}

The consequences of the fall in sin are just as dramatic as the consequences of the ethical choice, but diametrically opposite. In the ethical choice the human spirit posits itself as a free synthesis. This brings the aesthetic and the ethical in the individual into harmony with each other and opens up for him the good that hides within all creation. Vigilius writes that in the fall the spirit posits itself in the human being so that it pervades the synthesis differentiatingly (adskillende). This has the “double consequence” that both sexuality and sin come into the world.\textsuperscript{773} The sexual drive has its own telos, propagation.\textsuperscript{774} Thus, the human synthesis becomes “posited as contradiction” (presumably as a contradiction of the animal and spiritual). This contradiction, taken as a task, is according to Vigilius the starting point of the individual history.\textsuperscript{775} At the same time, through generation and heredity, sinfulness comes also to have another history, the history of the human race. It is namely so that in propagation sinfulness is also propagated so that one may speak of “hereditary sin.” However, Vigilius keeps emphasizing that while sinfulness “moves in quantitative catego-

\textsuperscript{771} CA, 45 and 61 / SV1 IV, 316 and 331.
\textsuperscript{772} CA, 43 / SV1 IV, 313.
\textsuperscript{773} CA, 48–49 / SV1 IV, 319.
\textsuperscript{774} CA, 69 / SV1 IV, 338.
\textsuperscript{775} CA, 49 / SV1 IV, 319–320.
ries,” sin “constantly enters by the qualitative leap of the individual.”\textsuperscript{776} In other words, the fall of the first man, Adam, does not directly necessitate the fall of subsequent individuals, but every individual brings sin and sinfulness into the world by his own first sin.\textsuperscript{777}

In a certain sense, then, it seems that each individual has his own world: each individual posits himself those spiritual “qualities” into finitude, which he will find in it. In other words, if the individual did not affirm sin, this spiritual quality would not be in the world for him. The individuals do not live in separate physical and historical worlds. The members of the human race live in the same physical world and they are connected to each other both through generation and through history. Therefore, what each of them does contributes in some “quantity” to the situation in which the others find themselves. But each individual is independent in that he reacts to his situation freely. Therefore, each bears the ethical responsibility for how he reacts, that is, for the “qualitative leap” he makes in freedom. Vigilius explains: “Since the race does not begin anew with every individual, the sinfulness of the race does indeed acquire history. Meanwhile, this proceeds in quantitative determinations while the individual participates in it by the qualitative leap.”\textsuperscript{778} In consequence, every individual bears the same guilt for his fall and for the sinfulness that he finds in the world and in the other individuals.\textsuperscript{779} Vigilius argues: “The presence of sinfulness in a man, the power of example, etc.—these are only quantitative determinations that explain nothing, unless it be assumed that one individual is the race, whereas every individual is both himself and the race...”\textsuperscript{780} Thus, a human being who is situ-

\textsuperscript{776} CA, 47 / SV\textsuperscript{I} IV, 318.
\textsuperscript{777} CA, 31 and 33 / SV\textsuperscript{I} IV, 303 and 305.
\textsuperscript{778} CA, 33 / SV\textsuperscript{I} IV, 305
\textsuperscript{779} See CA, 34, 59, 60, and 109 / SV\textsuperscript{I} IV, 306, 329, 331, and 378.
\textsuperscript{780} CA, 31 / SV\textsuperscript{I} IV, 304.
ated in the nexus of nature and history but also actively situating himself in it, is at the same time both a member of the race and an ethically responsible individual. According to Vigilius, this is both how it is and how it is meant to be: the human being should bear ethical responsibility for the whole human race.

Vigilius makes this point by giving a new definition for the word “individual.” He claims that “man is individuum [undivided, indivisible] and as such simultaneously himself and the whole race, and in such a way that the whole race participates in the individual and the individual in the whole race.”\textsuperscript{781} We are at the same time independent individuals and members of an indivisible human race. In the key passage, which we shall here quote in full, Vigilius underscores that this is both how it is and how it should be. He writes:

At every moment [i ethvert Øieblik] it is so that the individual is both himself and the race. This is man’s perfection viewed as a state. It is also a contradiction, but a contradiction is always the expression of a task, and a task is movement, but a movement that as a task is the same as that to which the task is directed is an historical movement. Thus the individual has a history. But if the individual has a history, then the race also has a history. Each individual has the same perfection, and precisely because of this individuals do not fall apart from one another numerically any more than the concept of race is a phantom. Every individual is essentially interested in the history of all other individuals, and just as essentially as in his own. Perfection in oneself is therefore the perfect participation in the whole. No individual is indifferent to the history of the race any more than the race is indifferent to the history of the individual. As the history of the race moves on, the individual begins constantly anew, because he is both himself and the race, and by this, in turn, the history of the race.\textsuperscript{782}

\textsuperscript{781} CA, 28 / SVI IV, 300.
\textsuperscript{782} CA, 28–29 / SVI IV, 301. (Translation slightly altered.)
This sounds rather Hegelian and appears to run counter to the statements of Johannes Climacus in *Postscript* that “every individual is ethically set apart by himself” \(^{783}\) and that “the individual’s own ethical actuality is the only actuality.” \(^{784}\) Thus, Gregor Malantschuk lets us understand that the ideal of being “both himself and the race” is an ideal only at the lower level of man’s development. He writes: “‘This,’ namely, that man is both himself and the race, is spoken of as man’s perfection, that ideal of man that can be actualized within the development of the human race in time where man has not as yet entered into relation with the eternal and where the highest ideal is that of serving the race.” \(^{785}\) According to Malantschuk’s interpretation, Kierkegaard’s authorship moved from the *individual* (Individ) who “stands in a relationship of thoroughgoing dependence upon the race and environment,” to the *single individual* (den Enkelte) that stands in an “existential God-relationship.” The task Kierkegaard set for the individual was to “work his way out of his dependence in order to win self-dependence.” \(^{786}\) The view that the individual should become “the single individual” that stands in an existential relation to God is already clear on the basis of *The Concept of Irony* and *Either/Or*. But does becoming “the single individual” mean in Kierkegaard’s view that the individual ceases to be a member of his race and ceases to partake in the destinies of the humanity, as Malantschuk suggests? That I do not believe. Before moving on in the exegesis

\(^{783}\) *CUP*, 323 / *SVI* VII, 278.

\(^{784}\) *CUP*, 327 / *SVI* VII, 382.

\(^{785}\) Malantschuk 1971, 17. (The translation of the passage from *Frihedens problem i Kierkegaards Begrebet Angest* (1971) is from the commentary in the Hong edition of *The Concept of Anxiety*; see CA, 231.)

\(^{786}\) *IP* 2, pp. 597–598 / Malantschuk 1993, 67. In *Fra Individ til den Enkelte* Malantschuk grounds his view on the statements of Climacus in *Postscript*, on his own interpretation of the theory of stages, on *Fear and Trembling*, and on the juxtaposition of the individual immortality with the procreation of the race in Kierkegaard’s late *Journals and Papers* (see Malantschuk 1978, 196–203).
of The Concept of Anxiety, I try to argue briefly against this view of Malantschuk shared by, for example, Mark C. Taylor and Heidi Liehu.\footnote{Taylor 1980 and Liehu 1990.}

If Malantschuk’s were the correct interpretation of the passage in question, the situational aspects of human existence should be Christianly done over with, and the sooner the better. But, in my view, the interpretation is wrong; Kierkegaard keeps advocating a holding-on to human situatedness and a participation in the destinies of the human race.\footnote{In his Begrebet angst hos Søren Kierkegaard Arne Grøn holds it as the view of both Vigilius Haufniensis and Kierkegaard that the task of the individual personally to appropriate the history of the race so that history does not become fate for the individual (Grøn 1993, 113–117). In his Subjektivitet og negativitet: Kierkegaard Grøn criticizes Taylor’s and Malantschuk’s view on the relation between the individual and the race (see Grøn 1997, 223 n and 224 n). In his interpretation, Grøn maintains that dependence on other subjects is always implied in Kierkegaard’s conception of the human self and that the ultimate Christian ideal is again to relate oneself to the other subjects (see ibid, 223–285). In her Svimmelhedens etik (2000) Pia Søltoft has brought out the evidence from Kierkegaard’s Works of Love that substantiates this line of interpretation. However, neither Grøn 1997 nor Søltoft 2000 thematizes the situatedness of the subjects in the historical world.} Man’s perfection is to be at every moment both himself and the race. That this is the Kierkegaardian line of thought right to the end is, in my view, confirmed by a passage from Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers quoted by Malantschuk himself. The passage from the year 1854 clearly reinstates the Christian ideal of “individuum” as Kierkegaard’s personal ideal:

I do not make myself better than others. Therefore it is not true what the old bishop [Mynster] once said to me, that I speak as if the others were on their way to hell, no, (if I can be said to speak about going to hell at all, then my speech is:) if the others are on the way to hell, then I shall go along… But that I do not believe, to the contrary I be-
lieve that we will all be saved, I also, something which arouses my deepest wonder.789

In other words, to suffer together with the race is Kierkegaard’s Christian ideal, and the movement of the Kierkegaardian subjectivity goes from the temporary ethical-religious isolation towards a paradoxical Christian unity with the race. This is also confirmed by the chief advocate of isolation in Kierkegaard’s authorship, Johannes Climacus himself, who in one of the footnotes of his Postscript makes the following statement:

Only in the final qualification of the religious, the paradoxical-religious, does the race become higher, but then only by the virtue of the paradox; and in order to become aware of the paradox one must have the qualification of the religious [i.e. the ethical-religiousness of Religiousness A] in between, that the individual is higher than the species, lest the differences of the spheres coalesce and one speak esthetically about the paradoxical-religious.790

Here Climacus combines ethical-religious individual responsibility with a Christian-dogmatic sense of belonging to the race. Thus, the view of Vigilius Hauflniensis that the individual is, and is to be, “both himself and the race” appears also in Postscript to be the Christian ideal. This suggests that Malantschuk’s interpretation of the passage in question must be incorrect. Further evidence we get from a passage of The Concept of Anxiety, in which Vigilius identifies being “the single individual” with being “individuum” and connects both conceptions with Christian views on hereditary sin and providence. In the passage Vigilius tries to point out the difference between a fatalistic pagan conception of the fall and the correct Christian one, which does not give up freedom:

789 Pap. XI 3 B 57, p. 105.
790 CUP, 554 n.2 / SV VII, 483 n.2.
[In Christianity] the concepts of sin and guilt posit precisely the single individual (den Enkelte) as the single individual. Nothing is spoken of relation to the whole world or to the past. What is spoken of is only that he is guilty, and yet he is supposed to have become guilty by fate, consequently by that which nothing is spoken of, and thereby he is supposed to have become something that precisely cancels the concept of fate, and this he is supposed to have become by fate.

A misunderstanding of this contradiction will result in a misunderstanding of the concept of hereditary sin; rightly understood, it gives the true concept, in the sense that every individual is both himself and the race, and the subsequent individual is not essentially different from the first. In the possibility of anxiety, freedom collapses, overcome by fate, and as a result, freedom’s actuality rises up with the explanation that it became guilty... So sin comes neither as a necessity nor as an accident, and therefore providence corresponds to the concept of sin.\footnote{CA, 98 / SV I IV, 367–368.}

To interpret, the individual becomes guilty and falls into sin in anxiety about his situation in the middle of the sinful world and history. However, he bears his ethical responsibility for giving himself up to anxiety and assumes the guilt for his fall freely. In this sense he is “the single individual.” At the same time he considers himself as a member of the race and his lot as a design of providence that in the world leads individual human beings towards the good. In the following exegesis I try to bring out further evidence to back up the above interpretation. We shall now move from Chapter I to Chapter II of The Concept of Anxiety in order to see how the fall of the single individual situates the other members of the human race.

According to Vigilius Haufniensis, the fall of Adam, and again the fall of any subsequent individual, “posits sin in himself, but also for the race.”\footnote{CA, 57 / SV I IV, 327.} In fact, Vigilius suggests that the fall has an
effect even on non-human existence. Relying on the word of the apostle, he states that after the fall the whole creation falls into a state of imperfection characterized by an anxious longing to get out of this state, by *apokaradokia tes ktiseos* (Rom 8:19). The apostle Paul explains that, through the fall of man, the creation was also subjected to futility and corruption. Following F. W. J. Schelling’s philosophy of nature, Vigilius presumes that in this alteration creation has become distorted and frightened. Presumably, the idea of Vigilius here is not that the chaotic and cruel events that appear in inanimate and animate nature (earthquakes, wolves eating lambs, etc.), and all the physical suffering and death that meets the living creatures of nature, would be due to the fall of Adam. We may presume that the idea is rather that as other living creatures experience the effects of man’s corruption, the effects of his purposeless and destructive behavior here in the world, they become anxious and disturbed. In other words, the sin of man affects the situation where animals find themselves in nature: something that should not belong to their life-word enters into it with the effect that their nature also gets distorted.

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793 *CA*, 57–58 / *SV* IV, 327–328.
794 See Rom 8:19–21.
796 This would be in contradiction with the statement of Johannes Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments* that nature has come into existence simultaneously and that after that event nothing significantly new happens in it: “Nature’s imperfection is that it does not have a history in another sense [except that it once came into existence] (*PF*, 76 / *SV* IV, 239).” Here Kierkegaard apparently disagrees with Schelling’s school, which was able to perceive dialectical development in the nature. (I owe this observation to a discussion with Ingrid Basso in Copenhagen 2006.) Since *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments* were written in the same time and Kierkegaard was planning to publish both of them originally on his own name (see *SKS* K4, 185–186, 192–193, and 319–323), we may read these works together and use passages from the one work to understand passages of the other.
Be this interpretation correct or not, in any case Vigilius claims that the distortion of nature reflects again in the souls of the subsequent members of the race, even in the souls of the innocent ones, since they, too, become anxious as they anticipate the signs of sinfulness present in the world. According to Vigilius, “creation is placed in an entirely different light because of Adam’s sin, and insofar as it [i.e. sin] continues to come into the world, sensuousness is constantly degraded to mean sinfulness.”797 In other words, even the innocent person apprehends the human fall in sensuousness and its consequences in human and inhuman nature. He senses in anxiety that sensuousness potentially alienates the creation from its origin, form its Creator.

But anxiety caused by the fall is transferred into the procreated individuals also more directly through sexuality and generation. Vigilius writes that, according to the Christian view, “each individual begins in an historical nexus, and the consequences of nature...hold true.”798 Part of the consequences of nature is that anxiety and sensuousness accumulate and that the procreated members of the sinful race are always more anxious and sensuous than their predecessors. Vigilius claims that since both in the moment of conception and in the moment of birth the spirit of the mother is at its furthest from her body, the anxiety in her reaches its maximum in these moments. The (somewhat strange) hypothesis of Vigilius appears to be that this anxiety is transferred to every new individual, so that at the starting point of his life he will be even more anxious, and more bent to seek support from the sensuous, than his parents were.799 Thus the procreated member of the race

797 CA, 58 / SVT IV, 329.
798 CA, 73 / SVT IV, 342.
799 CA, 72 / SVT IV, 341. As a child of the European culture of his times Vigilius notes in this connection that only among aboriginal (that is, in spiritual respect less developed) peoples “one finds the analogy of the easy delivery of animals.” This, however, appears to contradict with the hypothesis that Adam
bears in his heritage two extremely anxious moments more than his parents and, for this reason, he is potentially even further away from the Creator than his parents.

While it is, perhaps, hard to accept this theory on the consequences of nature that bind us in anxiety, it is easier to accept the examples Vigilius gives us on “the historical nexus.” According to Vigilius, the individual is situated in sinfulness not only in and through generation, but also through the historical relationship in which he stands to the other members of the race. The historical nexus, through which the individual is bound in sin, has many strands. Through the tradition even the innocent individual has obscure knowledge of sin: through the stories told to him, he comes to know that sensuousness may signify sinfulness and such knowledge may raise in him anxiety that makes him fall. He is told about how individual after individual has fallen in sin and then he appropriates these stories in the wrong way. He forgets his own individual freedom and believes that the stories tell what will by necessity also happen to him. In anxiety, then, he actually falls in sin. Alternatively, anxiety for being regarded as guilty by persons that are important to the individual might make him fall in sin. Or he might fall due to the bad example others give to him, i.e. due to his corrupt environment. Thus, it is the traditions, the views and expectations held by the others, and the sinful life, in the middle of which he finds himself in society, that contribute to the fall of the individual. However, the point of Vigilius is that the fall itself still does not take place as a necessary process of history or society. It takes place through the intermediate terms of anxiety and freedom, and it is a “qualitative leap,” a free action for which

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was the first man and also the aboriginals were his descendants. In other words, there seems to be evolutionary and creationist elements mixed in the view of Vigilius.

800 See CA, 73 / SV IV, 342–343.
801 See CA, 75 / SV IV, 344.
the individual must bear ethical responsibility.\textsuperscript{802} Thus, we may say that, even if the individual is always already situated in his sinful environment, in the situation he actively posits the sin in the world and situates himself in sin and in sinfulness, for not before the leap takes place does the sin have an abode in him, and not before he knows the sin by his own experience does he really come to know the sinfulness of the world.\textsuperscript{803}

Either the individual who has fallen may escape the consciousness of sin, which escape, however, is just a new manifestation of sin; this is the possibility that Vigilius investigates in Chapter III of \textit{The Concept of Anxiety}. Or the individual becomes conscious of the sin in him; this is the possibility investigated in Chapter IV, which we shall now turn to. We shall investigate the second possibility first, and the first possibility second.

In Chapter IV Vigilius writes that when the individual truly realizes that the sin is in himself, the distinction between good and evil is posited for him \textit{in concreto} and the anxiety in the individual is either “about evil” or “about the good.”\textsuperscript{804} From his exposition that follows we learn that the evil \textit{in concrete} is, first, the sin actually present in him. Second, it is the sin as the possibility ahead of the individual that he sinks ever deeper in sin. Finally, it is the sin that the individual has experienced in himself that he tries in vain to erase in repentance, and that, in consequence, repeats itself

\textsuperscript{802} \textit{CA}, 75–76 / \textit{SVI IV}, 344–345 together with \textit{CA}, 22 / \textit{SVI IV}, 294.

\textsuperscript{803} Lest the word “experience” be misunderstood here, let it be emphasized that an act of freedom cannot be experienced passively, but only through performing it. Thus, the individual does not just experience the fall passively, but he has experience of what it is like to give oneself to sin. In other words, the word “experience” is understood here in the sense of “having experience of doing something.” Kierkegaard seems to use the word “experience” in this sense himself, when he writes in his journals that “sin and every manifestation of freedom...do not occur of necessity...but must be experienced (JP 4, 4037 / Pap. X 2 A 482).”

\textsuperscript{804} \textit{CA}, 111–112 / \textit{SVI IV}, 379–380.
Thus anxiety about evil appears to fill up all three dimensions of temporality. If the individual finds no way out of it, this anxiety comes to dominate his life so that his history comes to proceed in a movement from a state of anxiety to a state of anxiety through qualitative leaps of sin that recur again and again. Vigilius calls this imprisonment in evil “the bondage of sin.” With all due respect to Judge William, the individual cannot break this bondage of sin by repentance only. According to Vigilius, repentance does not help as anxiety “sucks out the strength of repentance and shakes its head.” Vigilius writes that the problem with repentance is, first, that it always comes a moment too late and, second, that it paralyzes the movement towards the good. Therefore, in order to overcome anxiety and to reach the good in concrete—which Vigilius identifies with freedom, truth, salvation, and the unity of state and transition—the individual needs faith. Vigilius claims:

The only thing that is truly able to disarm the sophistry of sin is faith, courage to believe that the state itself is a new sin, courage to renounce anxiety without anxiety, which only faith can do; faith does not thereby annihilate anxiety, but, itself eternally young, it extricates itself from anxiety’s moment of death (Angestens Dødsøieblik). Only faith is able to do this, for only in faith is the synthesis eternal and at every moment (hvert Øieblik) possible.

\[\text{CA}, 113–116 / SVI IV, 381–384.\]
\[\text{CA}, 118–119 / SVI IV, 385–386.\]
\[\text{CA}, 116 / SVI IV, 384.\]
\[\text{CA}, 117–118 / SVI IV, 385–386.\]
\[\text{CA}, 111 n. / SVI IV, 379 n.\]
\[\text{CA}, 138 / SVI IV, 404.\]
\[\text{CA}, 119 / SVI IV, 387.\]
\[\text{CA}, 113 and 135 / SVI IV, 381 and 402.\]
\[\text{CA}, 117 / SVI IV, 385.\]
If, however, the individual is in anxiety not only about the evil, but also about the good—which now must come to him from outside, since he himself has his life in sin, and which in a certain sense signifies his death, since it brings his former life to the end—then he defends himself against the good, that is, against freedom, truth, salvation, and the unity of state and transition. He closes himself off and tries to negate, or abstract himself from, the good. Here we have the demonic phenomena which, Vigilius assumes, “have never been as widespread as in our times,”⁸¹⁵ that is, as in the Christendom of the enlightened and reflective 19th century. Like the bondage of sin, that is, the desperate anxiety about evil, the demonic anxiety about the good is a state out of which sin constantly breaks forth.⁸¹⁶ It is a state of inclosing reserve that expresses itself in sudden reactions against the good that tries to approach it and disclose it. In itself it is without content, it is a boring state of emptiness that stubbornly resists the good outside itself.⁸¹⁷

In many respects the characterization Vigilius gives of the demonic resembles the characterization Magister Kierkegaard gave of the Romantic irony and the characterization Judge William gave of the aesthete A. Like the Romantic ironist and the young friend of Judge William, the demonic person is inclosed in his own world, loves sudden actions that turn things upside down, lacks continuity, and ends with the contentless, with nothing. Vigilius also makes a distinction that is parallel with the distinction between the empty, immoral Romantic irony and the mastered irony that integrally belongs to the life of the ethical and religious person in this world. He emphasizes the difference between demonic inclosed reserve and the reserve that a person with ethical and religious inwardness is bound to have. For example, Socrates was

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⁸¹⁵ CA, 136 / SV I IV, 402.
⁸¹⁶ CA, 123 / SV I IV, 390.
inclosed “in order to be expanded in the divine.” Thus, inclosing reserve may sometimes signify “the highest freedom” as when an individual nurtures within himself a great idea. The difference between the good and bad case of inclosed reserve lies in the relation of the individual toward the good and communication. In the good case, the person is inclosed against the evil around him, precisely because he fights for freedom and the good. In such a case, for example, in Marcus Brutus (85–42 BC) as described by Plutarch and Shakespeare, inclosing reserve is in fact the expression of expansiveness in the good and freedom. Although Brutus might appear to be inclosed in the demonic way, on the deeper level he was not, inasmuch as the ground of his action was freedom that desires to overcome all the obstacles that stand in the way of disclosure in the good. In contrast to this, the demonic person is anxious about the disclosure in the good. In him, as in every human being, there is still a will to good and freedom; but this will, which wills the revelation, is subordinate and impotent in him, while the demonic will, which wills inclosing reserve, is dominant. It is important to pay attention to the difference between the good and evil forms of inclosed reserve, because it brings to light the fact that when Vigilius investigates the psychology of the sinner, he still keeps in consideration the situatedness of the individuals. For example, in the Rome that was dominated by the dictator Julius Caesar, the good man, like Marcus Brutus, could not act frankly, even though on the deeper level he was frank and earnest. This good case of inclosed reserve reminds us that not only is

818 CA, 134 / SVI IV, 401.
820 CA, 123 / SVI IV, 391.
821 CA, 128–129 / SVI IV, 396.
the sin posited in the individual, but sinfulness is present also in the world around him.

According to Vigilius, demonic anxiety about the good has many forms. Because the human being is a synthesis of the body and soul sustained by the spirit, the demonic may manifest itself either in the somatic- psychic sphere or in the sphere of spirit. Freedom may be lost, first of all, somatically-psychically. Vigilius writes: "The body is the organ of the psyche and in turn the organ of the spirit. As soon as the serving relation comes to an end, as soon as the body revolts, and as soon as freedom conspires with body against itself, unfreedom is present as the demonic."

As manifestations of the somatic- psychological forms of the demonic anxiety, Vigilius gives a list of what in our time would be considered as mental disturbances and diseases: "A hypersensibility and a hyperirritability, neurasthenia, hysteria, hypochondria, etc"; as an extreme case he mentions "bestial perdition" of which he gives as an example the demoniacs that Christ meets in the New Testament. The idea of Vigilius is not that he who comes under these psycho-somatic states would thereby commit sin; the idea is that under these states the individual is liable to fall in sin. As we noticed before, what is decisive is not the psychological state, but the movement of freedom, that is, the spiritual attitude that one takes with respect to such a state. Presumably, one may suffer from mental disturbances and illnesses in all innocence, without conspiring against freedom and without closing oneself off from the good. However, to give oneself to these states, to surrender oneself to them in demonic anxiety, means falling in sin.

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823 CA, 136 / SV I IV, 403.
824 CA, 136–137 / SV I IV, 403.
825 However, Kierkegaard personally saw it as a difficult problem to know whether one's case is demonic or not. In a notebook from year 1843 he writes: "Life first begins to be difficult when the life-task itself becomes dialectical: i.e.,
From Vigilius’ discussion on the bestial perdition, we get again a glimpse of the social dimension of his thought. Vigilius notices that among such demoniacs “there is a cohesion in which they cling to one another so inseparately and anxiously that no friendship has an inwardsness that can be compared with it.” Thus, there is extraordinary sociability (Socialitet) in the demonic anxiety.\textsuperscript{826} We may assume that this kind of demonic sociability also characterizes the pneumatic forms of the demonic. As Vigilius maintains that the demonic is nowadays widespread and manifests itself especially in the spiritual spheres,\textsuperscript{827} we may suspect a similar sociability also here. As will be argued below, what Vigilius in Chapter III calls “spiritlessness” might be understood as a social manifestation of such pneumatic inclosedness.

In the pneumatic forms of the anxiety about the good, the individual shields himself against the truth with the help of abstract reflection. If the good is the revelation of the truth that brings salvation and makes the individual free, then every attempt to shield one’s inwardsness against this revelation must be deemed demonic.\textsuperscript{828} According to Vigilius, “truth makes man free,” but “truth is for the individual only as he himself produces it in action.” Consequently, “if the truth is for the individual in any other way...we have a phenomenon of the demonic.”\textsuperscript{829} The truth that Vigilius writes about here is, apparently, not any true sentence when the previous dialectic must constitute the task. This is the case wherever freedom enters the discussion. A man is mentally unhinged; human power and the freedom of will can indeed work against it—here the problem is: shall he persecute himself, as it were, and perhaps go mad over his inability to overcome it, or shall he humble himself under it? And yet is not this humility weakness? Shame on them who whimper when the task itself is not dialectical. [A page removed from the journal.] (JP 1, 905 / Pap. IV A 149.)”

\textsuperscript{826} CA, 137 / SV1 IV, 403–404.
\textsuperscript{827} CA, 136 / SV1 IV, 402.
\textsuperscript{828} CA, 127 / SV1 IV, 394.
\textsuperscript{829} CA, 138 / SV1 IV, 404–405.
whatsoever, but the eternal that men should actualize in their personal ethical-religious existence. Vigilius writes that when the eternal is not understood altogether concretely, that is, with inwardness and earnestness, then the truth, freedom, and the good are lost pneumatically. Such is precisely the case when the reflective person denies the eternal in man, or when he conceives it altogether abstractly, or conceives it only in the sphere of imagination, or conceives it metaphysically.\textsuperscript{830}

It is these pneumatic forms of the demonic that are so widespread in our reflective age. According to Vigilius, they manifest themselves not only among skeptics and scientific speculators, but among the so-called orthodox and pious as well.\textsuperscript{831} To understand and to understand are two things, notes Vigilius. One may understand, for example, a speech abstractly or one may understand it concretely, so that one understands the personal it refers to. The concrete self-consciousness is not just contemplation, but action.\textsuperscript{832} The point of Vigilius is that the pneumatic demoniacs lack such concrete, subjective understanding of the truth: they lack that inwardness and certitude that can only be attained by subjective action.\textsuperscript{833} What excludes inwardness in their case is reflection.\textsuperscript{834} For example, one searches in reflection proofs for the immortality of the soul or for the existence of God, and while one is searching, one forgets the consequences that one’s immortality has for one’s personal life and gives up the inwardness of existing in the omnipresence of God. Here the unity of contemplation and action typical to the concrete personality is obviously lacking. But the same also holds with the “adherent of the most rigid orthodoxy” and with “the so-called pious.” In a state of unfreedom, the

\textsuperscript{830} CA, 151–154 / SV I IV, 416–420.
\textsuperscript{831} CA, 138–141 / SV I IV, 405–407, see also CA, 144–145 / SV I IV, 410–411.
\textsuperscript{832} CA, 142–143 / SV I IV, 408–409.
\textsuperscript{833} CA, 138 and 141 / SV I IV, 405 and 407.
\textsuperscript{834} CA, 142 / SV I IV, 408.
orthodox sticks to the formulae of the dogma and the rigid external forms in which the faith is supposed to express itself. But, claims Vigilius, at the same time he fails to attain that certitude that one is able to attain only by giving up the superstitious idolatry of the forms and by appropriating the eternal truth in one’s personal inwardness. On the other hand, “the so-called pious” (apparently the Moravian awakened) similarly sticks in anxiety to outward forms. Vigilius describes how in a forced attempt he tries to make his acts and expressions commensurable with the divine, but always “blunders and comes off badly with his heavenward glance and folded hands etc.” Vigilius compares a “pious” person with a person “who cannot dance but nevertheless knows enough to beat the time, although he is never fortunate enough to get in step.”

In other words, here, too, the unity of contemplation and action, the unity of state and transition (which Vigilius identifies with freedom, truth, and the good in concrete), is missing, because personal reflection fails to be contemporaneous with personal inwardness, and vice versa.

But the groups Vigilius mentions (the philosophical and theological speculators, the rigid orthodox, and the pious awakened) still do not cover much of the population of Copenhagen (Haufniensis), where Vigilius practices his calling as a watchman (vigiliius). In order to justify his thesis that the pneumatic way to lose one’s freedom has never been as widespread as in his times, we may also have a look at what Vigilius calls “paganism within Christendom,” spiritlessness (Aandløshed). The spiritless person has a relation to spirit, but not a personal one and, consequently, the relation actually means nothing to him. The spiritless person pos-

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836 CA, 136 / SV’I IV, 402.
837 See CA, 93–94 / SV’I IV, 363–364. The following analysis has been inspired by what Arne Grøn has written about spiritlessness in Grøn 1993, 150–156, and in Grøn 1997, 155–159.
senses the truth, but only “as rumor and old wives’ tales.” According to Vigilius, nothing prevents the spiritless person “from repeating by rote a philosophical rigmarole, a confession of faith, or a political recitative,” but what he says he does not say by virtue of spirit. He has security and feels no anxiety, but only because he understands nothing spiritually and comprehends nothing as a task. Notably, just like paganism, spiritlessness is bent to idolatry: “It worships a dunce and a hero with equal veneration, but above anything else its real fetish is a charlatan.” According to Vigilius, nothing prevents the spiritless person “from repeating by rote a philosophical rigmarole, a confession of faith, or a political recitative,” but what he says he does not say by virtue of spirit. He has security and feels no anxiety, but only because he understands nothing spiritually and comprehends nothing as a task. Notably, just like paganism, spiritlessness is bent to idolatry: “It worships a dunce and a hero with equal veneration, but above anything else its real fetish is a charlatan.”

Apparently, what Vigilius has in his mind here is the public that listens to the admired men of science and orthodox pastors and bishops alike, but that never attains a personal consciousness of sin and, consequently, feels no anxiety with respect to it. Spiritlessness is beyond a sense of guilt, as it cleverly seeks security in the common opinion and in the established formulae and as it hides itself behind the backs of the authorities and shies away from personal responsibility. But precisely this eagerness to find security makes one surmise that there might be anxiety hidden in spiritlessness, against which it closes itself off. As Vigilius notes, one may escape the anxiety aroused by spiritual trials by becoming spiritless. But as one closes oneself off from spiritual trials (Anfægtelse), one also closes oneself off from the good and freedom, and becomes inclosed in sin. As the spiritless individuals rely on what is held in esteem by the majority, spiritlessness is clearly a social phenomenon, and as there is reflection involved, the way the good and freedom are lost is pneumatic. Thus, we may diagnose spiritlessness to be a social manifestation of pneumatic unfreedom.

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838 CA, 94–95 / SV I IV, 364–365.
839 See CA, 51 / SV I IV, 322.
840 See CA, 94 / SV I IV, 364.
842 CA, 117 / SV I IV, 385.
But what is then the positive that Vigilius sets against all these different forms of “negativity”? What is the criterion for truly being in the good and freedom? According to Vigilius, “the question is whether the person will in the deepest sense acknowledge the truth, will allow it to permeate his whole being, will accept all its consequences.”

If he will, then he will have inwardness and certitude, that is, he will have earnestness (Alvor). What the speculator, the orthodox, and the spiritless all lack alike is the right kind of earnestness; in a sense they are earnest, but they are not earnest about their personal existence. In his *Psychology (Psychologie oder die Wissenschaft vom subjektiven Geist*, 1837), the student of Hegel, the philosopher Karl Rosenkranz (1805–1879) had defined “disposition” (Genys) as “the unity of feeling and self-consciousness,” in which “the feeling unfolds itself to self-consciousness” and “the content of self-consciousness is felt by the subject as his own.” Taken into consideration that in feeling sentience and all the immediate determinants of nature are also implied, here, writes Vigilius, we have “the conception of a concrete personality.”

Now, on the basis of this definition of “disposition,” earnestness may, according to Vigilius, be characterized as “the acquired originality of disposition, its originality preserved in the responsibility of freedom and its originality affirmed in the enjoyment of blessedness.” Through earnestness the eternal that originally belonged to disposition is repeated in it.

What Vigilius writes here about earnestness as repetition of the original disposition captures themes from *Either/Or* and *Repetition*. What he writes about inwardness brings to mind the “Ultimatum” of *Either/Or*, Part II, and what Johannes Climacus writes about the subjectivity of the truth in *Postscript*. The difference is

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843 *CA*, 138 / *SV1 IV*, 405.
844 *CA*, 149–150 / *SV1 IV*, 415–416.
845 *CA*, 147–148 / *SV1 IV*, 413–414.
846 *CA*, 148–149 / *SV1 IV*, 414.
that in *The Concept of Anxiety* the dogmatic framework and the orientation toward the reconciliation in Christ are explicitly there. “The enjoyment of blessedness (*Salighedens Nydelse*)” that belongs to earnestness may, therefore, safely be understood as referring to the reception of salvation in Christ, and certitude, inwardness, and earnestness may be understood as characteristics of faith.

References to Christ are clear in Chapter III, where Vigilius writes about the moment (*Øieblippet*) as “the fullness of time.” In the beginning of the chapter Vigilius points out against Hegelians that the categories of “transition” (*Overgangen*) and “the moment” do not belong in the sphere of logic, where necessity reigns, but “in the sphere of historical freedom.” By “transition” he refers, following Aristotle, to the transition from possibility to actuality and by “the moment,” following Plato, to that moment where the transition takes place. The moment is that “strange entity” (*atopon*, also “that which has no place”), which “lies between motion and rest without occupying any time” and into which and out from which what is in motion changes into rest, and what is at rest changes into motion. In the following pages he characterizes “the moment” further as that in which time is touched by eternity, as the present (*det Nærværende*) that is full, as the presence of the deity and the eternal in time, and as the moment with which history begins and through which temporality is posited, i.e. through which the division “the present time, the past time, the future time” acquires its significance.

According to Vigilius, the category of the moment “is of utmost importance in maintaining the distinction between Christi-anity and pagan philosophy.” He claims that the Greeks did not really comprehend the moment and therefore the eternal appeared

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847 CA, 81–82 / SV1 IV, 350–351.
848 CA, 82–83 / SV1 IV, 351–353.
850 CA, 84 n. / SV1 IV, 353 n.
to them “behind as the past,” as in the Platonic doctrine of recollection. On the other hand, Judaism was familiar only with the moment of the fall, which had separated the human being from the eternal (the moment as a *discrimen*, division). In consequence, the eternal appeared in Judaism only as the promised future that was anxiously waited for. In Christianity the pivotal concept is “the fullness of time.” According to Vigilius, this is “the moment as the eternal,” in which, however, the eternal also appears as the future (*det Tilkommende*) and as the past (*det Forbigangne*). This—the appearance of the eternal in time in Christ (Gal 4:4)—signifies the moment of conversion, reconciliation, and redemption both “in the world-historical significance” and “in the individual historical development.”

Thus, “the moment” comes to refer, first, to Christ (the alpha and omega, who for the believer is present at every moment, but also signifies the future and the past); second, “the moment” comes to refer also to faith as the state in which “the new is brought about through the leap,” that is, as the unity of state and transition.

So here we have the moment that belongs both to the history of the human race (the life of Christ understood in the light of faith) and to the history of the individual (the receiving of faith from Christ). Vigilius writes that although the moment (*Øieblik*) is as swift as a glance of the eye (*Øiets blik*) it is commensurable with the content of the eternal. It is the moment as an atom of time in which eternity appears as undivided, *en atomo*. However, the moment does not simply reconcile time and the eternal, but also shows the opposition between them. Vigilius writes that, whereas “dialectical sorcery” makes eternity and the moment sig-

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852 *CA*, 85 / *SV* IV, 354.
853 *CA*, 87 / *SV* IV, 357.
nify the same thing, in Christianity “eternity and the moment become the extreme opposites.”\textsuperscript{855} We may assume that Vigilius is here thinking of the crucifixion of Christ and the judgment of our sinful, temporally oriented existence implied in it. Vigilius also writes that the moment posits the temporality in which eternity constantly permeates the time, but time “constantly cuts off (\textit{afskærer}) eternity.”\textsuperscript{856} We may again assume that Vigilius is thinking here not only how difficult it is for the individual to hold on to the eternal in time, but also how the sinful individual reacts to Christ. In a footnote Vigilius also refers to the eschatological dimension of the Christian moment: the world will pass away in the moment, \textit{en atomo kai en rhipe ophalmou} (1 Cor 15:52).\textsuperscript{857} Thus, the anxious expectation of the eternal in time does not characterize only Judaism, but also Christianity. But, as noted above, in another passage Vigilius maintains that the Christian faith extricates itself from “the anxiety’s moment of death,” and in the Christian faith the synthesis “is eternal and at every moment possible.”\textsuperscript{858}

Consequently, anxiety is perfectly justified in the light of Christian revelation and belongs to the life of the Christian: the sinful individual and the member of the sinful race has good reasons to be anxious about the sin both within and around him, and he also has full reason to be anxious about the coming judgment. The task, however, is now set: it is constantly to resist and overcome sin\textsuperscript{859} by moving from the state of anxiety toward the unity of state and transition in faith. This task is pointed out in Chapter V, the last chapter of \textit{The Concept of Anxiety} entitled “Anxiety as Saving through Faith.” Here Vigilius maintains that every human

\textsuperscript{855} \textit{CA}, 84 n / \textit{SV1} IV, 354 n.
\textsuperscript{856} \textit{CA}, 89 / \textit{SV1} IV, 359. (Translation slightly altered.)
\textsuperscript{857} \textit{CA}, 88 n / \textit{SV1} IV, 358 n.
\textsuperscript{858} \textit{CA}, 117 / \textit{SV1} IV, 385. (The passage was quoted above, when discussing the anxiety about the evil.)
\textsuperscript{859} See \textit{CA}, 15 / \textit{SV1} IV, 287.
being must learn to be anxious in order not to perish. When the
individual learns that “the terrible, perdition, and annihilation live
next door to every man,” he is raised over all the finite ends and,
through faith, anxiety becomes “absolutely educative” for him. Every
individual, writes Vigilius, is able to manipulate the finite
relations in which he is assigned a place: it is possible for him to
persuade them, to coax something else out of them, to escape from
them, to keep himself a little outside, to prevent himself from ab-
solutely learning something from them. In other words, every hu-
man being is able to escape from the given actuality into the sphere
of possibility. However, through anxiety and faith the individual
comes to face the absolute in earnest and after that he will have a
different attitude toward the actuality where he finds himself. The
individual learns that “he can demand absolutely nothing of life,”
and now “he will praise actuality, and even when it rests heavily
upon him, he will remember that it nevertheless is far, far lighter
than possibility was.”

The movement through anxiety to the new life in faith, which
is sketched above, resembles the movement through irony to ethi-
cal life. Since the human being is related not only to the actual,
temporal, and finite, but also to the possible, eternal, and infinite,
he is able to overcome the given actuality and manipulate it freely;
only the infinite as “nothing” limits human freedom. This is what
the ironist discovered, but since he had the infinite only in the
form of nothing, he fell prey to this “nothing” and lost his contact
to actuality. The remedy of Magister Kierkegaard was mastered
irony. Thanks to his ethical relation to the infinite and eternal, the
ethicist has something fixed in his life and thus he is able to master
his irony. Subdued under the ethical, irony becomes a “serving
spirit” that helps the individual to actualize actuality: the baptism

860 CA, 155–156 / SVI IV, 421–422.
862 See CI, 275 and 279 / SVI XIII, 347 and 351.
of irony rescues the soul “from having its life in finitude,” even though the soul remains “living energetically and robustly in it.” Thus, with the help of the ethical, the individual is able to return from the sphere of the possible and to find his way back to the historical actuality, where he belongs.\footnote{See \textit{CI}, 325–326 / \textit{SV1} XIII, 389–390.} Similarly in \textit{Either/Or} the ethicist found his place anew in finite relationships after he had first accomplished the infinite movement of the ethical choice.\footnote{See \textit{EO2}, 214–215, 246–247, and 251 / \textit{SV1} II, 192–193, 221–222, and 225.} In \textit{The Concept of Anxiety} Vigilius seems to sketch a new variant of this movement through the possible, eternal, and infinite to the actual, temporal, and finite. Since the human being is related not only to the actual and finite, but also to the possible and infinite, he is able to overcome the given actuality and manipulate it freely. His freedom, however, brings out the “nothing” of possibility. Anxiety in human inwardness is the expression of an individual’s relation to this “nothing,” and Vigilius claims that without faith, that is, without the “inner certainty that anticipates infinity,”\footnote{\textit{CA}, 157 / \textit{SV1} IV, 423.} this anxiety for nothing makes the individual dizzy and binds him in sin. However, if anxiety leads to faith, anxiety becomes a “serving spirit” that enters into the soul of the individual, torments everything finite and petty out of it,\footnote{\textit{CA}, 159 / \textit{SV1} IV, 424–425.} and then leads the individual back to actuality, which is now understood in the light of Christianity. Now the individual interprets the events of the actuality, where he finds himself, as works of providence (\textit{Forsynet}). He sees the events of his life not as necessary, nor accidental, but as expressing God’s good will.\footnote{\textit{CA}, 97–98 and 161–162 / \textit{SV1} IV, 367–368 and 426.}

Vigilius claims that as a “serving spirit,” anxiety leads the believer against its will to where he wishes to go. Tamed by faith, it
eradicates what it discovers, first fate then guilt.\textsuperscript{868} Vigilius writes that in these times, “whoever performs on the stage of the theater of life is like the man who traveled from Jericho and fell among robbers [see Luke 10:30].” Against this fate the innumerable calculations of shrewdness (Klogskaben) will eventually be of no help.\textsuperscript{869} This is obviously a polemical claim, for in the well-ordered, civilized and Christian 19\textsuperscript{th} century Europe, where according to Magister Kierkegaard everything was carefully calculated and the life of the good bourgeoisie “proceeded calmly with measured step,”\textsuperscript{870} the possibility to fall among robbers was seemingly nonexistent. As the optimistic Judge William could also confirm, no good Christian was at this time stabbed, decapitated, crucified, or burned alive in Europe for his Christian convictions like in the bad old days. However, the dogmatic Watchman of Copenhagen (vigilius Haufniensis), claims all the same that in his times the fate of each individual is to fall among robbers. To interpret, he maintains that sin is not eradicated in Christendom, but is still at work in it, even if in more hidden forms. With his reference to Luke 10:30, Vigilius suggests that people now have less regard for God and their neighbor than what they used to have in the time of Christ. If one has shrewdness, one may be able to lead an apparently successful life. For example, among spiritless people one just becomes spiritless oneself and then one will not get into conflicts with one’s surroundings. But anxiety, which takes into consideration the ultimate, points out that worldly success is a slim consolation, if one loses one’s eternal soul by living in terms of the world. Vigilius explains:

So when shrewdness has completed its innumerable calculations, when the game is won—then anxiety comes, even before the game in

\textsuperscript{868} CA, 159–161 / SV1 IV, 425–427.
\textsuperscript{869} CA, 160–161 / SV1 IV, 426.
\textsuperscript{870} See CI, 303–304 / SV1 XIII, 371–372.
actuality has been lost or won, and anxiety makes the sign of cross against the devil, and shrewdness becomes helpless and its most clever combinations vanish like a witticism compared with the case that anxiety forms with the omnipotence of possibility.  

That anxiety makes “the cross” against shrewdness I take also as an allusion to the fate of Christ. By paying attention to this fate the shrewd person learns to despise worldly wisdom, sagaciousness, and bourgeois-philistinism. Why? Because what Christ did (suffered and died for our sins) was not at all worldly wise or sagacious, whereas it was very sagacious and wise, indeed, to betray him and leave him into the hands of the rabble, just as it was very wise to pass by “the man from Jericho” as fast as possible.

Hence, by facing this fate, by staring at the cross in anxiety and by thinking of the parable of the good Samaritan, the individual is “weaned away from shrewdness by himself,” and “with the help of faith, anxiety brings the individual to rest in providence.” But how does the idea of hereditary sin teach the individual to rest in providence? To understand the idea of Vigilius, we may seek light in Chapter III. There Vigilius explains that the anxiety of fate arises as the human spirit relates to something that it does not comprehend as spirit, but to which it nevertheless stands in a spiritual relation. Thus, fate was the “nothing” that the pagan Greek, who still did not have the correct conception of spirit, was anxious about. In the Greek world-view no hero was able to avoid fate that at one moment appeared as necessary and unbending, at the next moment as accidental and capricious. However, with Christianity and with its conception of hereditary sin, what was earlier re-

871 CA, 160–161 / SV I IV, 426.
873 Cf. Mt 16:21–23, where Christ makes “the sign of cross” to Peter, who brings forward the viewpoint of human sagaciousness.
Chapter 5: The Concept of Anxiety and Philosophical Fragments

regarded as fate came now to be understood as providence. In addition, Christianity recognized the phenomena of life that the great playwrights of Greece depicted: the helplessness of the individuals in the vicissitudes of life and their inevitable, ultimate fall. But Christianity assigned these phenomena to hereditary sin and believed that these events still serve the purpose of providence. Vigilius suggests that as every individual is both himself and his race, he is bound to become guilty, to fall in sin, as if by fate. However, if the individual has faith, he sees the inevitability of his fall not as a work of fate, but as a work of providence that ultimately leads him and his fellow beings toward salvation in Christ. Vigilius writes: “[S]in comes neither as a necessity nor as an accident, and therefore providence corresponds to the concept of sin.” To interpret, in the situation where he finds himself the individual cannot help falling in sin, but as an individual he still falls of his own free will and bears the responsibility for his fall. To make sense of this event, the individual considers it in the light of faith and now he is able to see that, although it is sin and something to be doomed, the fall has its place in the way of salvation that God has prepared for individuals: the fall opens the possibility for the individual to establish through faith a free, self-conscious, spiritual relation to God. In this way the anxiety about fate leads to faith and against its will helps to eradicate what it brought to light, the phenomenon of fate.

The second thing that anxiety discovers and helps to eradicate is guilt. If the individual is educated only in finitude and not educated absolutely by anxiety about his infinite guilt, then the judgments of the courts and comparison with other persons become the highest standards the individual measures himself with. But when the individual becomes anxious of himself, anxious about

\[876\] CA, 97–98 / \textit{SV1} IV, 367–368.
being infinitely guilty, he gives up making petty comparisons. However, as we know from Postscript, suffering from a sense of infinite guilt may paralyze the individual. In Chapter III of The Concept of Anxiety, Vigilius takes as his example, first, the Judaism of the Old Testament, which through repeated sacrifice tried in vain to get rid of the sense of guilt that spreads itself everywhere. Second, he takes as an example the religious genius, who turns toward himself and, in front of God, discovers his freedom, but also his falling short of freedom, his guilt. For the religious genius freedom and guilt now become possibilities that he keeps staring at in anxiety. “At last,” writes Vigilius, “it is as if the guilt of the whole world united to make him guilty, and, what is the same, as if in becoming guilty he became guilty of the whole world,” for “whoever becomes guilty also becomes guilty of that which occasioned the guilt” and “whoever yields to temptation is himself guilty of the temptation.” According to Vigilius, only with the Christian conception of sin and reconciliation (Forsoningen) through faith is the individual able to overcome anxiety about guilt. As the actual sin is posited together with reconciliation, the individual is, on the one hand, liberated from his uncertainty about whether he is guilty or not guilty and, on the other hand, he has now been given something positive upon which to build up, i.e. Christ, in whom he is reconciled with God, even if he is a sinner.

877 CA, 161 / SVI IV, 427.
878 CA, 104 / SVI IV, 373. The source of Vigilius’ critique appears to be Heb 9–10 (CA, 247 n.50 / SKS K4, 476–478).
881 CA, 109 / SVI IV, 378.
882 CA, 104 and 162 / SVI IV, 373 and 428.
With these visions *The Concept of Anxiety* ends and we are now ready to move on to *Philosophical Fragments*, where the dramatic historical moment that opens up reconciliation is analyzed and described. But before we move on, let us consider once more how the individual becomes situated in actuality through sin and what his situation will be like before he receives faith from God.

In Chapter I of *The Concept of Anxiety* Vigilius describes the fall in sin as an event in which the subject comes to experience something passively, but in which he is also active. The situation, in which the subject falls in sin, is composed of several elements that the subject experiences as incomprehensible and alien to his immediate, innocent existence: the ideas of good and evil given to him in language, the idea of God who punishes for doing evil, the incomprehensible thread of death; the uncertain future that becoming aware of the choice between good and evil and of the thread of death creates; and, finally, the anxiety about freedom that relation to the uncertain future arouses in the subject. In this situation the activity of the subject, the "qualitative leap," consists of giving himself up to anxiety. In anxiety, then, the subject next lays hold of finiteness to support himself. When freedom arises again, “it sees that it is guilty” and sees that the world is not the same anymore.\(^{883}\)

The method that Vigilius uses to clarify the fall is quite interesting. In clarifying the fall Vigilius uses his imagination and describes poetically the concrete situation in which the subject stands and acts. He does not isolate the soul of the subject and then start to reflect which of the faculties recognized in philosophical and theological psychology it is that causes the individual to fall. He denies that the fall would be an event that results from the conflict between reason and sinful desires (*concupiscencia*) within the subject. The agent is not determined in a straightforward

manner by this or that faculty of his soul, so that the explanation of the fall would be that the bad desires in him overcame his reasonable will. If this were the correct explanation of his action, his action would be determined by his sinful nature and, thus, the action could not be regarded as free and ethically accountable. Second, his action would be determined by his sinful nature even before the fall in sin. Therefore, Vigilius wants to call into question traditional views of the fall. In other words, he wants to avoid the dichotomies that abstract reflection has created and that have led either:

1. to the fantastic view that Adam’s fall determines the fall of the whole race and to the deterministic views of the fall of the subsequent individuals, or
2. to the abstract Pelagian views on fully independent individuals and to the denial of the phenomena that pertain to hereditary sin.

How does Vigilius avoid getting stuck with the *aporia* of theoretical reason: how does he slip through between the vortex-like Charybdis of determinism and the multi-headed Skylla of abstract individualism? By reading the narrative of Genesis in accordance with the hermeneutical principles of *unum noris omnes* (“to know one is to know all,” in the sense: “you know the others on basis of your self-knowledge”) and *de te fabula narratur* (“the story is told about you”). He identifies himself with the individual who

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884 See CA, 40 / SV I IV, 312.
886 CA, 79 n. / SV I IV, 347 n.2.
887 In CA, 73 / SV I IV, 342–343 Vigilius writes about “a misunderstood appropriation of the historical *de te fabula narratur*, in which the point, the originality of the individual, is excluded, and the individual forthwith confounds himself with the race and its history.” But if there is “a misunderstood appropriation,” by implication there must also be a correct one. Apparently, the correct appropriation of *de te fabula narratur* would be to appropriate the story as a free and responsible human individual who, however, is akin to and shares the his-
in the narrative finds himself in a concrete situation. He does not isolate the soul of the subject from the concrete situation of the fall, but reconstructs in his imagination the situation and puts his soul into it. In *The Concept of Anxiety* he describes vividly how the agent stands there as subject to the laws given by the Other, but as free, conscious of his “being able,” and as facing the incomprehensible future in anxiety for his freedom. By putting his soul into the situation, Vigilius—and the reader, who as a human being shares the ideas, the psychological and spiritual possibilities, and the life-situation with the protagonist of the drama—is in his turn able to “experience” the dramatic event that takes place: he becomes conscious of anxiety as the ambiguous “intermediate term” (*Mellembestemmelse*) of the action that the reflective philosopher, or theologian, tends to forget, and he comprehends how in this

tory, the basic human possibilities, and the basic situations with other human individuals. In this sense the fall of one individual is always of interest and never something indifferent to the other.

888 See *CA*, 39–41 / *SV1* IV, 311–312, where Vigilius argues that *concupiscencia* cannot be the “intermediate term” that explains the qualitative leap. Vigilius argues that if one claims that the fall is explained by inordinate desire, “the qualitative leap is enervated” and “the fall becomes something successive.” Then he goes on to present the correct “intermediate term,” i.e. anxiety as the ambiguous state that prepares for the leap (see *CA*, 41–42 / *SV1* IV, 313–314 and confer with *JP* 1, 102 / *Pap. X 2 A 22). See, also, *CA*, 75–76 / *SV1* IV, 344–345, where the need of correct ambiguous intermediate terms is emphasized for explaining how a person, who has grown up in a corrupt environment, falls in sin: “Intermediate terms! Intermediate terms! An intermediate term is provided that has the ambiguity that rescues thought (without which the salvation of the child becomes illusion), namely, that the child, whatever its circumstance was, can become both guilty and innocent. If one does not have the intermediate terms promptly and clearly at hand, the concepts of hereditary sin, of sin, of race, and of the individual are lost, and with these the child also.” If the ambiguous intermediate term of anxiety is forgotten, the transition from the given general possibility to the reproduced singular actuality becomes necessary and ceases to be a “qualitative leap.”
ambiguous and tension-filled state of anxiety the subject takes the fatal action that signifies his fall.

In this way Vigilius resolves the problem with which theoretical reason would get stuck: when the subject falls, is the fall ultimately caused by nature and environment or by free will? The answer of Vigilius is that when the subject falls, he falls in anxiety and in this intermediary state his action is both passive and active, caused both by his nature and environment and by his free will. We may compare falling in sin with falling in love that Judge William described in *Either/Or*. Just like the first love, the first sin is an event in which necessity and freedom, the temporal and eternal, the sensuous and spiritual touch each other with pregnant consequences. According to Judge William, in falling in love a synthesis of opposites takes place. First love is sensuous, yet it is spiritual. First love is in the instant, yet it has an eternity in itself. First love is a unity of freedom and necessity.\(^\text{889}\) As opposed to falling in love, falling in sin is an event in which the human synthesis gets distorted, but in it both moments of the human synthesis are also involved and there is a similar combination of activity and passivity. And just as falling in love is a beginning for a lifelong union and an event that changes the whole world of the individual, so is falling in sin.

Chapter II of *The Concept of Anxiety* describes how the fall in sin has certain dramatic consequences not only for the individual himself, but also for the living creatures around him. As a result of the fall, the subject is divided within himself, and the contradiction between the spiritual and the sensuous is now posited in him and becomes an actual problem for him. The view of Vigilius appears to be that neither reason nor desire is free from sin as long as the subject as a whole is in sin: in the pneumatic sphere sin appears as selfishness, and in the somatic-psyical sphere sin appears as

\(^{889}\) EO2, 42–46 and 60 / SV1 II, 40–43 and 55.
sexual drive that has its own telos.\textsuperscript{890} Neither reason nor desire as such is sinful, but sin makes both sinful and through them sin also has an effect in the world and in the history of the race. This means that the fall of the subsequent members of the race takes place in the historical world that is already marked by sin. Moreover, the world experienced by every subsequent generation always has more traces of sin in it than the world experienced by its predecessor: in its world, there is more anxiety and more phenomena that give the individuals occasion to fall in sin. For example, the traditions that tell about falling in sin may themselves fill the individual with anxiety and cause him to fall. Consequently, even innocent people share the anxiety caused by sin and the idea that the life around and within them is, on some fundamental level, distorted.

However, as paganism both within and outside Christendom shows, one may remain ignorant of “the qualitative leap of the fall.” How is this ignorance, this absence of personal sin-consciousness to be explained, if sin has really left its stamp in all existence? According to the view that Vigilius presents in Chapter III of his book, the absence of the consciousness of sin is just another consequence of sin.\textsuperscript{891} Anxiety caused by sin is there at the bottom, but it is either suppressed, as in the modern spiritlessness that seeks security in vacuous sociability, or it has a wrong object,

\textsuperscript{890} I am interpreting here the passages CA, 48–49 and 76–79 / SV\textsuperscript{I} IV, 319–320 and 345–348. We may compare this view of Vigilius with the view that Judge William presented in Either/Or: “Yes, indeed, the Christian God is spirit and Christianity is spirit, and there is discord between the flesh and the spirit, but the flesh is not the sensuous—it is the selfish. In this sense, even the spiritual can become sensuous—for example, if a person took his spiritual gifts in vain, he would then be carnal. (EO\textsubscript{2}, 49 / SV\textsuperscript{I} II, 46.)” Against the judge, Vigilius claims that the definition of sin as selfishness is too pneumatic and does not take into consideration that “sin posits just as much a sensuous as a spiritual consequence (CA, 77 / SV\textsuperscript{I} IV, 346).”

\textsuperscript{891} CA, 93 / SV\textsuperscript{I} IV, 363.
such as fate in the Greek paganism or guilt in Judaism.\textsuperscript{892} But from the Christian point of view also these states are states of sinfulness.\textsuperscript{893}

According to Vigilius, the consciousness of sin was actually first posited only with Christianity.\textsuperscript{894} Thus, when Vigilius in Chapter IV starts to analyze “Anxiety of Sin or Anxiety as the Consequence of Sin in the Single Individual,” he is now characterizing anxiety and sin in their opposition to the Christian faith. It is in the light of Christ that “the distinction between good and evil is posited \textit{in concreto}” and that the object of anxiety becomes “a determinate something.”\textsuperscript{895} The object of anxiety will now be either sin as the evil, or freedom (truth, salvation, and the unity of state and transition) as the good.

Let us try to put ourselves into the situation of the person who through Christianity has the consciousness of sin, but does not have faith in Christ and in salvation. Who or what can such a person trust? He cannot trust himself, for he is aware that he has fallen in sin. He cannot trust the world, when considering the sinfulness of which he now sees all too clearly. He cannot trust the other members of the human race, who are either innocent and consequently cannot help him, since they know nothing about sin, or are sinners no better than he himself and consequently cannot be trusted. In this sense, he has full reason to be anxious about evil, since the fall has left him facing the evil that now surrounds him from every direction.

How could the good and truth reach such a person, who is in evil and in untruth due to his sin? If the sin in the individual makes the subject doubt everything, why would he trust anyone who tries to communicate the good to him or bring him divine

\textsuperscript{892} CA, 93–110 / SVI IV, 363–378.
\textsuperscript{893} CA, 93 / SVI IV, 363.
\textsuperscript{894} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{895} CA, 111–112 / SVI IV, 379.
help? The anxious resistance that the “bestial perdition” and the other somatic-psychical forms of the demonic offer to the good make good sense, if we assume that the persons in question are personally acquainted with sin. On the other hand, if the sin in the individual makes the individual doubt everything, how could he appropriate a new teaching declared by some “apostles” or a teaching handed down by the fathers without taking a skeptical, critical attitude towards it? The resistance that the pneumatic forms of the demonic offer to the good make good sense, if we assume that the persons in question are themselves acquainted with sin.

To such a situation sin has, according to Vigilius, posited the subject. It is obvious that what we have termed the ideal of living poetically, the ideal that one would

- become brought up by God, while
- assuming ethical-religiously one’s role and place in the historical actuality,

must now appear as an impossibility for him. The subject has lost his positive relation to God and there is no way for him to become God’s disciple here in the sinful world. Above, in chapter 4, it was pointed out how in the existential stage of Religiousness characterized by religious suffering and a sense of total guilt, the full realization of the ethical-religious ideal of living poetically became almost impossible. As a reaction to this possibility, the existential stage of humor seemed to revoke the project of living poetically. Upon the concept of sin introduced in The Concept of Anxiety the ethical-religious project seems to be definitely wrecked. As Vigilius himself writes, ethics “presents itself as the task for every man in such a way that it will make him the true and the whole man.” But in the struggle to actualize the task of ethics sin shows itself. Vigilius writes that with the aid of repentance ethics is shipwrecked upon sin as sin shows itself to the individual “not as something that belongs only accidentally to the accidental individual, but as something that withdraws deeper and deeper as a deeper and
deeper presupposition, as a presupposition that goes beyond the individual. In consequence, if freedom and the possibility of the good are not re-established for the individual anew, ethics becomes a power that just binds him more tightly into sin.

As we noticed in the beginning of this chapter, in Postscript Johannes Climacus gives a parallel description of the predicament of the sinner. He writes that sin as “a state in a human being” signifies “dreadful exemption from doing the ethical, the individual’s heterogeneity with the ethical.” For the sinner, “the ethical is present at every moment with its infinite requirement,” but he is incapable of fulfilling it, because he finds himself “in a state exactly opposite to what the ethical requires.” Climacus also writes that when the person is in untruth, the upbuilding religious truth evokes in him above all terror, and the leap that would renew the relationship to God, the “repetition,” appears to him as impossibility, as absurdity. Thus, while it is already paradoxical that the eternal truth is related to a person who exists in time, it must be considered as “absolutely paradoxical,” if the eternal truth is related to a person, who exists also in sin, i.e. who is actively in untruth. We shall turn to Philosophical Fragments in order to find out how the absolute paradox nevertheless may touch the sinner in the moment of time.

896 CA, 17–19 / SV1 IV, 289–291.
897 “If repetition is not posited, ethics becomes a binding power (CA, 18 n. / SV1 IV, 290 n.).”
898 CUP, 267 / SV1 VII, 227. Contrary to Vigilius, who claims that sin cannot be considered as a state, Climacus writes here that sin is a state. We return to this difference between the two later, in chapter 6.
899 CUP, 266–267 / SV1 VII, 226.
900 See CUP, 258 / SV1 VII, 218.
901 See CUP, 262–263 and 267 / SV1 VII, 222 and 226.
5.1.2 Becoming Situated through Faith

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Johannes Climacus lets us know that the decisive difference between all the other ethical-religious modes of existence (ethical existence, humor, and Religiousness A) and the Christian existence (Religiousness B) is that whereas the former lie in “immanence,” the latter is based on a break with immanence caused by the entrance of the eternal in time. In the “Introduction” to *The Concept of Anxiety*, Vigilius Haufniensis apparently refers to the same difference in presenting his view on the organization of different sciences. For Vigilius the great watershed in the division of sciences is whether they are based on immanence and recollection, or whether they are based on transcendence and repetition. Whereas in the first group of sciences the fundamental science is metaphysics, the ideal truths of which a human being is able to intuit by himself, the second group of sciences begins with dogmatics, the basic dogmas of which a human being understands only in the light of faith.

In *Philosophical Fragments* Climacus brings this difference into focus as a difference between the Socratic position A and the alternative and contrary position B, which at the end of the book he reveals to be the Christian position. The characterization “philosophical” in the title of the work is appropriate in as much as Climacus investigates in it the relationship between Christianity and philosophy “algebraically,” by focusing not on the historical costumes but on the essential structures of these two forma-

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904 *CA*, 21 / *SVI* IV, 293.
905 *CA*, 19–21 / *SVI* IV, 292–293.
906 Vigilius writes: “If repetition is not posited, dogmatics cannot exist at all, for repetition begins in faith, and faith is the organ of dogma (*CA*, 18 n. / *SVI* IV, 290 n.).”
907 *PF*, 109 / *SVI* IV, 271.
It is appropriate also in as much as the position of Christianity is developed in it ironically out of the position of philosophy. Pretending not to know which historical phenomenon provided him with the occasion to investigate the issue, Climacus, a modest private thinker, presents an abstract "proposition" for philosophical thought to solve: "Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?" To outline different answers to this problem, or cluster of problems, Climacus explicates first the Socratic paradigm A, and then constructs, seemingly through negation only, an alternative B, his brand new philosophical invention that goes beyond the Socratic and produces new concepts such as the moment (= the fullness of time), sin, savior (= deliverer, reconciler, judge), conversion, repentance, rebirth, and faith. The explanation and justification that Climacus gives in Postscript for this ironic, philosophical way to present the Christian truth was expounded in chapter 4: by clothing the Christian revelation ironically in the form of a new scientific hypothesis, Climacus wanted to bring out in Philosophical Fragments the contrast between Christianity and speculative thought. The ironic jest thus contained a serious point: it pointed out indirectly that human beings cannot invent the revelation of the truth in Christ.

Besides the ironic mode of presentation, it is worth noticing the peculiar method with which the central issues of philosophy and dogmatics are explored in Philosophical Fragments. We could speak of the psychodramatic method of investigation. In his pamphlet or play (Piece) Climacus composes dramatic situations. At

908 See PF, 91 and 109 / SVI IV, 254 and 270.
909 PF, 9 / SVI IV, 179.
910 PF, 1 / SVI IV, 173.
911 See chapter 4 above and CUP, 275 n / SVI VII, 234 n.
912 PF, 5 / SVI IV, 175.
the same time he imagines what in the inwardness of the protagonists gave rise to these situations and what takes place in their inwardness as are in them. As Niels Thulstrup has noticed, *Philosophical Fragments* "is like a classical drama in five acts, with an interlude interpolated between the last two acts." As in *Fear and Trembling* and in *Repetition*, dialectics is supported and complemented with poetical imagination that situates the problems in the concrete context of life. Although Climacus maintains that comprehension of the fact of revelation “that did not arise in any human heart” is beyond the power of human thought, imagination, and memory, he uses all of these human faculties to clarify it.

Climacus pictures two alternative teaching-learning situations. In the Socratic alternative A, the learner finds the eternal truth within his soul through recollection. This means that he is fundamentally independent of the teacher, who serves as a midwife only. Within this Socratic formation, “every human being is himself the midpoint, and the whole world focuses only on him because his self-knowledge is God-knowledge.” The Socratic individual is sufficient unto himself, but also humble enough to renounce all personal authority and to serve the other individual only as an occasion (Anledning) for him to recollect the truth. Since the individual finds in his own soul the eternal truth that had been there ever since eternity, the historical moment (the life of the teacher and the event of the encounter with him) that gave the occasion for recollection cannot interest him in any fundamental sense. Fundamentally the eternal happiness that he experiences as he recollects the eternal truth does not depend on the

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913 Thulstrup 1962, lxvii.
914 PF, 109 / SV1 IV, 271.
915 PF, 9–10 / SV1 IV, 179–180.
916 PF, 11 / SV1 IV, 181.
accidental and vanishing occasions that in the given historical actuality gave rise to spiritual self-activity in his inwardness.\textsuperscript{917}

In the opposite formation, formation B, the learner of the truth does not possess the truth within himself; on the contrary, he is defined “as being outside the truth...or as untruth.”\textsuperscript{918} Through his own fault he has lost the condition (\textit{Betingelsen}) for understanding the truth that God originally gave him, and now he is polemical against the truth. Such a “state” Climacus decides to call \textit{sin}.\textsuperscript{919} But how may the truth reach such a person, who “has forfeited and is forfeiting the condition” for understanding the truth? Only if the teacher not only brings him the truth, but brings him the condition for understanding it. In other words the teacher must not only reform the learner, he must transform him, so that the learner becomes a new person through the teaching-learning event. But no human being is able to achieve such a total conversion and rebirth of another person, and therefore the teacher, if there is such a teacher, must be \textit{the god (Guden)} himself. To such a teacher, who saves him from untruth and unfreedom and who erases his guilt, the learner owes everything and, accordingly, it is appropriate that he calls him with names such as savior, deliverer, and reconciler.\textsuperscript{920} The learner is never able to forget the historical moment, when the teacher appeared to him and when he received anew the condition for comprehending the truth from the teacher. Accordingly, it is appropriate that he calls this moment in which the eternal filled up the time with the special name \textit{the fullness of time}. Climacus explains that whereas within the Greek formation the pathos for the immortality of soul was concentrated in the recollection of the eternal that resides within the soul, in the projected formation the pathos focuses on this histori-

\textsuperscript{917} *PF*, 11–13 / *SV* IV, 181–183.
\textsuperscript{918} *PF*, 13 / *SV* IV, 183–184.
\textsuperscript{919} *PF*, 15 / *SV* IV, 184–185.
\textsuperscript{920} *PF*, 13–15 and 17–19 / *SV* IV, 184–185 and 187–188.
cal moment. He also notes that if the learner forgets the moment, he falls into sin again. In the light of this possibility, the teacher will appear to him not only as the savior and reconciler, but also as the judge, to whom he will be accountable for the use of the gifts of truth and freedom.  

Thus, the moment demolishes the balance, the immanent harmony, and the continuity typical to the Socratic formation. In the Socratic formation the teacher and the learner find themselves essentially in the same situation in the historical and social actuality. Within the pre-established harmony both are developing the good seeds that they find within themselves, while at the same time they do what they can to help each other towards the truth. Climacus describes the development of Socrates:

He was born in a specific situation (under bestemte Livsforhold), was educated among his own people; and when at the more mature age he felt a call and prompting, he began to teach others in his own way. Having lived for some time as Socrates, he presented himself when the time seemed suitable as the teacher Socrates. Himself influenced by circumstances (Omstændighederne), he in turn exerted an influence upon them. In accomplishing his task, he satisfied the claims within himself as much as the claims other people might have on him. Understood in this way—and this was indeed the Socratic understanding—the teacher stands in a reciprocal relation, inasmuch life and its situations (Forholdene) are the occasion for him to become a teacher and he in turn the occasion for others to learn something. His relation, therefore, is at all times marked by autopathy just as much as by sympathy. 

Such a teacher, who is at the same time a learner, respects the independence and equality of the pupil, and leaves the pupil in no debt whatsoever. Climacus notes: “Between one human being and

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922 PF, 23 / SV I, 192.
another, this is the highest: the pupil is the occasion for the teacher to understand himself; the teacher is the occasion for the pupil to understand himself; in death the teacher leaves no claim upon the pupil’s soul, no more than the pupil can claim that the teacher owes him something. The teacher expressly rejects all attempts to idolize him and to create a hierarchy of more and less privileged disciples. And even if the Socratic teacher loves his disciple, which is the reason why he willingly admits his ignorance and descends to the level of the disciple as he teaches, his love is only assisting, not re-creating love. He does not want to, and does not pretend that he could, change the disciple into another human being.

In the projected Christian formation it is the god’s love only that creates the teaching-learning situation, and the love aims at the rebirth and redemption of the disciple. The god does not need the disciple to understand himself, and he is not influenced by the historical situation and circumstances in which he finds himself, since as the Creator and the Lord he, of course, stands above them all. His resolution is from eternity and motivated only by his love for the learner. Love—to win the love of the learner—is also the goal of his movement and, therefore, although the movement does not begin with it, it aims at reciprocity, equality, and unity, for “only in equality or in unity is there understanding.” But how to achieve this equality, unity, and understanding that love desires is precisely the problem, since in the initial situation these are lacking due to the learner himself. This is why the god’s love is basi-

923 PF, 24 / SV1 IV, 192–193.
924 PF, 24 / SV1 IV, 193.
925 PF, 30 / SV1 IV, 199.
926 PF, 24–25 / SV1 IV, 193.
927 PF, 25 / SV1 IV, 194.
cally unhappy and he is in pain that he makes the learner unhappy, too, by revealing to him his true situation.\(^\text{928}\)

To find a solution for the difficult predicament of the god, Climacus makes a move that is not that often seen in the fields of philosophy and theology: he invites a poet to explore different possibilities with the help of fairy tales. First, a standard fairytale solution is tried out. Like the mighty king can easily raise the lowly maiden that he is in love with to his side and marry her, the god could bring out the unity by appearing to the learner in all his magnificence and by exalting him so that he would forget the misunderstanding in the tumult of joy. However, such deception could not satisfy the love of the god, since instead of resulting in the true glorification of the beloved learner, it would just produce a deeper misunderstanding of the actual state of affairs and would consequently result in secret anxieties in the heart of the learner.\(^\text{929}\)

Hence, unity and equality must be brought about another way, not through ascent, but through descent. To overcome the basic misunderstanding the god must descend to the level of human beings, that is, the god’s free self-humiliation, incarnation, is needed. And, in order for unity to be effected with the learner whoever he happens to be, the god must become the equal of the lowliest of human beings, that is, he is to make his appearance in the form of a humble servant.\(^\text{930}\)

The story that results from this poetic thought project is a story of suffering, a life of “sheer love and sheer sorrow.”\(^\text{931}\) The god makes himself known by his lack of concern for the worldly and by his exalted absorption in his work. Climacus describes:

\(^{928}\) PF, 25–28 / SVI IV, 194–197.
\(^{929}\) PF, 29–30 / SVI IV, 197–198.
\(^{930}\) PF, 30–31 / SVI IV, 198–199.
\(^{931}\) PF, 32 / SVI IV, 200.
Even though he was a lowly man, his concerns were not those that men generally have. He went his way unconcerned about administering and distributing the goods of this world; he went his way as one who owns nothing and wishes to own nothing, as unconcerned about his living as the birds of the air, as unconcerned about house and home as someone who has no hiding place or nest and is not looking for such a place. He was unconcerned about accompanying the dead to their graves, was not attracted by the things that commonly attract the attention of people, was not tied to any woman, so enthralled by her as to want to please her, but sought only the follower’s love.\footnote{PF, 56 / SV IV, 222.}

So we now have the god walking around the city in which he made his appearance..., to proclaim his teaching is for him the one and only necessity of his life, is for him his food and drink. To teach people is his work, and to be concerned about the learners is for him the relaxation from his work. He has no friends and no relatives, but to him the learner is brother and sister.\footnote{PF, 57 / SV IV, 223.}

Climacus explains how, for pedagogical reasons, in order to communicate his love, the god “must suffer all things, endure all things, be tried in all things, hunger in the desert, thirst in his agonies, be forsaken in death, absolutely the equal of the lowliest of human beings...”\footnote{PF, 32–33 / SV IV, 200.} However, despite all these exertions, the chances that he wins the learner to the truth are next to none. As a sinful human being, the learner has a tendency to “love only the omnipotent one who performs miracles” and not the one who humbled himself in equality with him.\footnote{PF, 33 / SV IV, 201.} Awareness of this potentiates the suffering of the god and makes his suffering inward. Climacus describes:
To want to express the unity of love and then not to be understood, to be obliged to fear for everyone’s perdition and yet in this way truly to be able to save only one single person—sheer sorrow, while his days and hours are filled with sorrow for the learner who entrusts himself to him...He knows that the learner is untruth—what if he made a mistake, what if he became weary and lost his bold confidence?\textsuperscript{936}

In this way the god bears “the possibility of the offense of the human race” and, combined with physical afflictions, of course, this is what makes his life into sheer sorrow.\textsuperscript{937} Hence, the suffering of death is far from being the only suffering of the god, although also this (as immortal to suffer death and as one who is innocent to suffer death)\textsuperscript{938} is a suffering hard to consider. Climacus points out that

his whole life is a story of suffering, and it is love that suffers, love that gives all and is itself destitute. What wonderful self-denial to ask in concern, even though the learner is the lowliest of persons: Do you really love me? For he himself knows where the danger threatens, and yet he knows that for him any easier way would be a deception, even though the learner would not understand it.\textsuperscript{939}

However, the god is not the only one who must suffer for his love; the learner is also bound to go through much spiritual and physical suffering, if he is to become a new person, to become conscious of his guilt, and still to be able to sit beside the god as his equal.\textsuperscript{940} The appearance of the god in the city, his walking around its streets creates a rather challenging situation for human beings. The news of the day becomes “the beginning of the eternity,” the

\textsuperscript{936} PF, 32 / SV I, 200.
\textsuperscript{937} PF, 33 / SV I, 200.
\textsuperscript{938} PF, 34 / SV I, 201.
\textsuperscript{939} PF, 33 / SV I, 200.
\textsuperscript{940} PF, 34–35 / SV I, 202.
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manifestation of the eternal “in its actual form...so that the moment is actually the decision of eternity!”941 In this situation human beings may react in different ways. Most of them become, perhaps, simply curious about the sensation of the day, so that for a moment a crowd will swarm around the teacher, only to become interested in something else the next moment. For some the event may give an occasion for more scrupulous empirical or philosophical investigations: they may become interested in the details of the teacher’s life (whether there really is something divine to be discerned in them), or in the teaching of the teacher (whether the doctrine he presents is sound and in harmony with their understanding and self-understanding).942 According to Climacus, the motive for both types of research might actually be offense—a suffering but at the same time active reaction to the scandalous claim that this lowly human individual is the god. The offended person rejects this claim as absurd and thereby rejects the truth and the condition for understanding the truth that the loving god is offering to him.943 Climacus describes the phenomenon as “the understanding’s unhappy love.”944 However, there is also a possibility that the human being accepts the condition and that his understanding falls happily in love with the paradox that it encounters.

According to Climacus, what prepares the ground for the happy encounter with the god in time is the paradoxical passion of understanding, through which already Socrates appears to have stepped toward the unknown. Plato describes how Socrates had a way of suddenly stopping on his walks and becoming fixed in his thoughts.945 Climacus suspects that in those moments “the under-

941 PF, 57–58 / SV1 IV, 223–224.
943 PF, 49–52 / SV1 IV, 215–218.
944 PF, 49 / SV1 IV, 216.
945 Symposium 174d–175b, cf. also Symposium 220c–d.
standing’s paradoxical passion” was awoken in him. 946 “This is the passion that wants “to discover something that thought itself cannot think,” wills the collision with this incomprehensible something, and, “without really understanding itself, wills its own downfall.” 947 Climacus claims that this passion, the passion to encounter the incomprehensible, “is fundamentally present everywhere in thought,” although, having fallen in habit, we usually are not aware of it. 948

What the passion wants to discover, is the unknown as “frontier” (Grænse) and as “the absolutely different.” This unknown Climacus calls by the name the god. He writes that if the understanding relates passionately to this unknown, it does not occur to it to want to demonstrate that it exists. 949 Thus, it never occurred to Socrates to demonstrate the existence of this unknown, that is, the existence of the god. Climacus claims that, when explicating the way of thinking that has later become known as the physico-teleological (or physico-teological) demonstration for the existence of God, Socrates “constantly presupposes that the god exists, and on this presupposition he seeks to infuse nature with the idea of fitness and purposiveness.” 950 The certainty that the god exists and governs our lives is, thus, not based on demonstrations of existence, but on the passionate leap that relates the known to the unknown, and vice versa. Climacus notes that without such a leap it would be impossible to anticipate the presence of the god’s wisdom in nature or the goodness and wisdom of his Governance (Styrelse) in the lives of human beings. 951

946 PF, 38 / SVI IV, 206.
947 PF, 37 and 38–39 / SVI IV, 204 and 206.
948 PF, 37 / SVI IV, 204.
949 PF, 39 and 46 / SVI IV, 207 and 212.
950 PF, 44 / SVI IV, 211.
951 PF, 42–43 / SVI IV, 209–211.
Through the paradoxical passion of understanding it is the concrete individual that is brought into relation with the unknown god. The limit experience that the person has when carried to his frontier by the paradoxical passion, accordingly, has a reflection also in his self-understanding. It affects the person, who in accordance with the paradigm of recollection believed that he knew himself and believed that his self-knowledge was knowledge of the god,952 so that he no longer knows what kind of creature he is and how he is related to the divine.953 As Socrates testifies in Phaedrus 230a, the person who relates passionately to the unknown god is no longer sure “whether he perhaps is a more curiously complex animal than Typhon [the mythic, multi-headed monster with a hundred serpents issuing from his thighs] or whether he has in his being a gentler and diviner part.”954

In this confused state the person may attempt to go further than the sober Socrates, who never thought that he would be able to know the unknown, the god.955 First, he may attempt to conceive the absolutely different with the help of fantasy. The consequence of this will be that “the one idea of the different becomes confused with many ideas about the different” and the unknown ends in diaspora (dispersion, exile) and becomes conceived now as the prodigious, now as the ridiculous, and so on. Climacus has in his mind here the fantastic plurality of gods that the pagan imagination produced. Climacus claims that in this way, with the help of pure, unrestricted human imagination, the understanding cannot transcend itself and grasp the absolutely different that actually lies beyond its limits. Instead the attempt results in “arbitrariness that knows it itself has produced the god.”956 Second, the person

952 PF, 11 / SV1 IV, 181.
954 PF, 39 / SV1 IV, 206.
955 Cf. CA, 3 / SV1 IV, 276.
956 PF, 44–45 / SV1 IV, 212–213.
may attempt to comprehend the absolutely different with the help of the following reasoning: In the absolutely different “there is no distinguishing mark”; therefore, “the understanding cannot even think the absolutely different.” But “[i]f the difference cannot be grasped securely because there is no distinguishing mark, then, as with all such dialectical opposites, so it is with the difference and the likeness—they are identical.” Thus the absolutely different becomes the absolutely identical.

Here Climacus clearly has in his mind the attempt of the German Idealists to comprehend the absolute. However, as Climacus notes earlier in his book, in this speculative attempt to go further than the Socratic, thought in fact just returns to the paradigm of recollection. As a practical corollary that lets itself to be derived from the speculative enterprise, Climacus presents the following:

There exists, then, a certain person who looks just like any other human being, grows up as do other human beings, marries, has a job, takes tomorrow’s livelihood into account as a man should. It may be very beautiful to want to live as the birds of the air live, but it is not permissible, and one can indeed end up in the saddest of plights, either dying in hunger—if one has the endurance for that—or living on the goods of others. This human being is also the god. How do I know that? Well, I cannot know it, for in that case I would have to know the god and the difference, and I do not know the difference, inasmuch as the understanding has made it like unto that from which it differs.

Thus, as a consequence of the speculative enterprise, the god comes to appear on the earth in the perfect incognito of the universally human. It is worth noticing how this immanent vision of

\[957\] PF, 44–45 / SV I IV, 212.
\[958\] PF, 45 / SV I IV, 212–213.
\[959\] See PF, 10 n.1 / SV I IV, 180 n.1.
\[960\] PF, 45–46 / SV I IV, 213.
the god as man resembles the ethical ideal presented by Judge William in *Either/Or*, and how it differs from the Christian vision that Climacus presents of the god, who went his way unconcerned “about administering and distributing the goods of this world,” unconcerned “about his living as the birds of the air.”

The conclusion that Climacus draws from these human attempts to conceive the god is that human beings need a revelation from the god himself to move beyond the Socratic and to come to know something about the god:

But this seems to imply something different, namely, that if a human being is to come truly to know something about the unknown (the god), he must first come to know that it is different from him, absolutely different from him. The understanding cannot come to know this by itself (since, as we have seen, it is a contradiction); if it is going to come to know this, it must come to know this from the god...

However, even if the god reveals himself to human beings, human understanding still cannot directly understand, cannot know that which is absolutely different from it. This follows from hypothesis B, according to which human beings have lost the condition to understand the truth due to their sin. Thus, the god must first of all reveal to human beings that due to their own fault, due to sin, they are absolutely different from the god; but at the same time he also reveals to human beings that he wants “to annul this absolute difference in the absolute equality.” This simultaneous revelation of sin and grace is the absolute paradox that the understanding cannot conceive by itself. In order to conceive this absolute paradox understanding must first surrender itself to the Socratic passion that wants to encounter the unknown, since in this paradoxical passion the understanding wills its own downfall, which is also

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961 See the passage from *PF*, 56 / *SV* IV, 222 that was quoted above. — We return to consider this difference later, in subdivision 5.3.

what the conceiving of the absolute paradox requires. If the understanding has this passion, a mutual understanding may become possible. However, “the happy passion,” in which the encounter actually takes place and which produces the mutual understanding, is not the Socratic passion of understanding. Instead, “the happy passion” is the condition that the human individual, according to hypothesis B, receives from the god as they encounter each other. This is the passion for which Climacus reserves the name faith (Tro). This gift, the passion of faith, is what distinguishes the disciple of the god from the offended person, who reacts against the god. While faith has a specific object, the god-man, and in this sense has a specific intentional and cognitive structure, what is essential in faith is the subjective side, i.e. the passion that one receives from the god-man. Thus, Climacus claims that faith is neither “a knowledge,” nor “an act of will,” but a passion that makes willing and understanding possible.

To clarify the nature of the Christian faith and to distinguish it from ordinary faith, Climacus inserts an interlude between the chapters IV and V of his dramatic poem, a dense discourse on the constitution of historical actuality and on its correct apprehension. According to Climacus, historical is that which has come into existence. But what is coming into existence (Tilblivelse)? According to Climacus, it is a change from “not existing to existing,” a transition “from possibility to actuality.” In coming into existence the possible that comes into existence suffers in that it “turns out to be nothing the moment it becomes actual.” Climacus claims that the change of coming into existence always takes place “in freedom,” by way of an acting cause that points

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964 PF, 59 / SV1 IV, 224.
965 PF, 62 / SV1 IV, 227.
966 PF, 75 / SV1 IV, 239.
According to Climacus, everything that has come into existence is historical. Thus nature is also historical, for it has once come into existence. But *historical in the stricter sense* is only such actuality that is “dialectical with respect to time,” that is, such actuality that in its existence has the temporal horizons of past and future. Apparently, Climacus identifies this actuality with human actuality. For this coming into existence, which is historical in the strict sense, the coming into existence of nature signifies a possibility. This coming into existence takes place by way of “a relatively freely acting cause,” which points in its turn to “an absolutely freely acting cause.”

Although Climacus operates in his “Interlude” with Aristotelian categories and addresses ancient and modern philosophical discussions on possibility, actuality, and necessity, the theistic interpretation falls quite naturally and gives sense to his conceptual structure as a whole. Climacus may be interpreted as saying that the world is freely created out of the nothingness of possibility by the god (the absolutely freely acting cause). In this world human beings (the relatively freely acting causes) have freedom, but only within the overall plan and order of the god. When they actualize possibilities, they do it because the god, who has created them and the world, allows it to happen. Thus, the human coming into existence takes place freely, but within the total coming into existence that is governed by the divine providence. In the human transition from possibility to actuality there is both passivity and activity, both suffering and freedom. Determined partly by the given states of the world and of the subject, the change is passive; but determined partly also by the choosing and acting human subject, the change is active and takes place in freedom. This makes it understandable, how, for example, the transition of the fall that was

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967 *PF, 73–75 / SVI IV, 236–239.*
968 *PF, 75–76 / SVI IV, 239–240.*
described in *The Concept of Anxiety* was simultaneously passive and active.

How is the historical actuality to be apprehended, then? Not at least as necessary. Climacus argues that although the way something has happened cannot be changed anymore, this unchangeableness does not make the past necessary. For although its actual “thus and so” cannot become different anymore, its possible “how” could have been different. Thus, the past historical actuality is no more necessary than the future and “to want to predict the future (prophesy) and to want to understand the necessity of the past are altogether identical.”

Climacus claims that if we want to apprehend historical actuality correctly, i.e. without changing it into something else, then we have to preserve in the apprehension the uncertainty in which historical actuality comes into existence: the nothingness of possibility, out of which the actual emerges in freedom, and the multiple possible “how,” out of which the actual “thus and so” emerges. Hence, the organ for apprehending the historical must be formed in likeness to the historical, must have a structure that corresponds to the double uncertainty of coming into existence. Belief (Tro) has such a structure. In it the deceptiveness (Svigagstighed) of the historical is present.

Climacus notes that belief always believes what it does not see: the transition “from non-being and from the multiple possible

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971 While in the Danish there is only one word “Tro”, in English a distinction may be made between “faith” and “belief.” Here, following the translation of *Philosophical Fragments*, “faith” refers to the faith in the god-man (what Climacus calls “Troen i ganske eminent Forstand”) and “belief” to the organ that comprehends the free coming into existence in the historical actuality (what Climacus calls “Troen i ligefrem og almindelig Betydning”). (See *PF*, 87 / *SVI IV*, 250.).
Chapter 5: The Concept of Anxiety and Philosophical Fragments

In this it runs a risk. As the Greek skeptics already noticed, “immediate sensation and cognition cannot deceive.” However, argues Climacus, coming into existence cannot be an object of immediate cognition, even when it takes place in front of one’s nose. For the person who is not contemporaneous with the past occurrence, the reports of the contemporaries are what are immediately given. In his case it is, of course, clear that he has to believe what he does not see. But Climacus also claims that the immediate contemporary has to believe, and cannot see, how something comes into existence. This makes sense, if one considers that in the change of coming into existence, that which is not, comes into existence by the way of a free cause: of course, what is non-existent (the possibility, the plan to be actualized), cannot be seen, and neither can it be seen that it was actualized through free will.

The first mark of coming into existence is “a break in continuity.” In accordance with this, when one apprehends coming into existence, there must always be a break in apprehension. In other words, when one apprehends, for example, the coming into existence of a star, one must first make its existence dubious. Genuine belief always goes through doubt: first belief makes dubious the immediately given, then belief believes its coming into existence. Climacus regards belief as a passionate resolution. He argues that neither doubt nor belief is a cognitive act (Erkendelses-Akt), but that they are opposite passions: “Belief is a sense for coming into existence, and doubt is a protest against any conclusion that wants to go beyond immediate sensation and immediate knowledge.”

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972 *PF, 81–82 / SV1 IV, 244–245.*
973 *PF, 83 n / SV1 IV, 246 n.*
974 *PF, 81–82 / SV1 IV, 244–245.*
975 *PF, 85 / SV1 IV, 249.*
976 *PF, 83–84 / SV1 IV, 247–248 together with PF, 81 / SV1 IV, 245.*
977 *PF, 84 / SV1 IV, 248.*
At the same time belief is also an act of freedom, an expression of will, and when one believes, one does not believe by way of a conclusion, but by way of a resolution.\(^{978}\) This corresponds well with the nature of coming into existence: according to Climacus, nothing “comes into existence by way of a ground, but everything by way of a cause.”\(^{979}\) In themselves the ideal structures of thought are capable of producing neither the historical event nor the apprehension adequately corresponding to the event. What is needed is a passionate resolution that actualizes the structures both in actuality and in apprehension.

Both coming into existence and the resolution that apprehends it take place in the moment of time so that what transcends time, the atemporal “plan,”\(^{980}\) is brought into time. Climacus describes the teleological method that pertains to the apprehension of the historical: “[I]n any progress of this sort there is in each moment a pause (here wonder stands \textit{in pausa} and waits for the coming into existence), which is the pause of coming into existence and the pause of possibility precisely because \textit{telos} [end, goal] is outside.”\(^{981}\) Climacus is apparently thinking of the view shared by Plato (in \textit{Theaetetus} 155 d) and Aristotle (in \textit{Metaphysics} 982 b) that philosophy begins with \textit{thaumazein}, wonder.\(^{982}\) The description also associates with what Climacus wrote about the paradoxical passion that moved the thought of Socrates toward the unknown. In the light of this paradoxical passion Socrates was able to view the world as purposeful and its events as works of the god, although he could not know or demonstrate the existence of the god.\(^{983}\) Perhaps it was in such moments of impassioned insight that Socrates

\(^{978}\) PF, 83–84 / SV I IV, 247.
\(^{979}\) PF, 75 / SV I IV, 239.
\(^{980}\) See PF, 73 / SV I IV, 237.
\(^{981}\) See PF, 80 / SV I IV, 244.
\(^{982}\) SKS K4, 279.
\(^{983}\) See PF, 37–44 / SV I IV, 204–211.
suddenly stopped on his walks and became fixed in his thoughts. Anyway, in the teleological method wonder stands still in *pausa* and apprehends the eternal *telos*, the atemporal “plan” that always lies beyond the historical movement, but at the same time gives it sense and purpose for historical actuality.

So Climacus outlines in his “Interlude” the principles of historical actuality and its apprehension. The view is in harmony with the theistic and fideistic interpretation of history and with an ethical-religious understanding of the lot of human individuals in it. God is behind all coming into existence. However, the human individual cannot know this, but may only believe in it. The lot of the human beings is to be receptive to the word of God and then to actualize it. If this is the case, they are able to see the world as purposive and as harmonious with their true freedom.

The point of the “Interlude,” however, is not just to present this overall view of the historical actuality and its apprehension, but to show how within this framework the coming into existence of the *god* is a subversive event that restructures the historical. This purported historical fact is based not only upon the contradiction between the possible and the actual, the idea and the concrete existence, as all historical facts are. It is a fact “based upon a self-contradiction *[Selvmodsigelse]*.” This means, first of all, that there are *no essential differences between human beings that have become personally related to this fact*. For example, the closeness in time to this purported fact does not have any essential significance. While immediate contemporaneity may be regarded as an advantage when it comes to comprehending ordinary historical facts, “face to face with a self-contradiction and the risk entailed in assenting to it, immediate contemporaneity is no advantage at

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985 See *PF*, 78 n / *SV* IV, 241 n.
all.” Second, the self-contradictory character of the event means that to apprehend the event faith in the eminent sense is needed. Such faith differs from the ordinary beliefs that have as their objects the manifestations of freedom in history. Like those manifestations, those acts of belief are acts of human freedom, expressions of human will that relate the possible to the actual. However, in order to have faith in the coming into existence of the god, the human being needs first to see and hear the purported god (or hear or read about him), but in addition to that he also needs to receive the passion of faith from the god himself. It follows by itself that, for example, Socrates did not have such faith, and neither did he have the consciousness of sin that goes together with such faith.

In the final chapters of his book, Chapters IV and V, Climacus examines how the individual becomes contemporary with the god through faith. Climacus notes that no one has ever been immediately contemporaneous with the historical fact of the god’s coming into existence. The reasons for this are, first, that it is impossible to be immediately contemporaneous with any historical event, that is, with any case of coming into existence. In order to apprehend coming into existence, one always needs to go beyond the immediately given by way of belief. But on top of that, it is totally impossible to be an immediate contemporary of the self-contradictory fact of the god-man. The so-called “immediate contemporaneity” (seeing, hearing, or touching the man, who claims or who is claimed to be the god) can only be “an occasion” and as such it may give rise to a variety of possible movements in a human spirit. It can become an occasion for acquiring knowledge on the historical details, for concentrating Socratically upon oneself, for becoming offended, or for receiving the passion of faith from the god.

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988 *PF*, 87 / *SV1*, 250 together with *PF*, 47 / *SV1*, 214.
989 *PF*, 87–88 / *SV1*, 251.
and, in consequence, for seeing the glory of the god with the eyes of faith. 990 In other words, “immediate contemporaneity” is never more than an occasion and true contemporaneity with God always requires the passion of faith.

The passion of faith the individual receives by falling in faith and by surrendering his understanding to it. Climacus describes this “downfall” (Undergang) or “going to the ground” (at gaae til Grunde) of the understanding thrice in his book. 991 According to his most comprehensive account,

It occurs when the understanding and the paradox happily encounter each other in the moment, when the understanding steps aside and the paradox gives itself, and the third something, the something in which it occurs (for it does not occur through the understanding, which is discharged, or through the paradox, which gives itself—consequently in something), is that happy passion to which we now shall give a name, although for us it is not a matter of the name. We shall call it faith. 992

In faith the individual is able to understand the paradox, not in the sense that he would now understand how it is possible, but in the sense that he understands that what he confronts here really is the paradox. 993 With the eyes of faith, the individual now “sees” that this man is the god. In this autopsy (eye-witness, firsthand experience) a human being is contemporary with the god. But this means that in and through the passion of faith the noncontemporary (in the sense of immediacy) may also be a contemporary. 994 As noticed above, with respect to the apprehension of ordinary his-

991 PF, 47–48, 54, and 59 / SV1 IV, 215, 220–221, and 224.
992 PF, 59 / SV1 IV, 224.
993 PF, 59 / SV1 IV, 224 together with PF, 47–48 and 54 / SV1 IV, 214–215 and 220–221.
994 PF, 67 and 70 / SV1 IV, 231 and 233.
torical facts, one’s position in time counts. It is an advantage to be a contemporary eye-witness, or at least as close as possible to such eye-witnesses, so that one is able to assure oneself of their reliability. But, claims Climacus, when it comes to this absolute historical fact, time is not able to apportion in a crucial sense the relations of people to it. Climacus writes:

Just as the historical becomes the occasion for the contemporary to become a follower—by receiving the condition, please note, from the god himself...—so the report of the contemporaries becomes the occasion for everyone coming later to become a follower—by receiving the condition, please note, from the god himself.

By means of [Formedelst] the contemporary’s report (the occasion), the person who comes later believes by virtue of [i Kraft af] the condition he himself receives from the god.

On the basis of this Climacus argues that the god, who personally gives the passion of faith to the individuals, has no “second hand” disciples, and still less “fifth or seventh hand” disciples, for in order to be his disciple, the individual must always be a first hand disciple.

Climacus argues that, essentially, all who receive the condition from the god and become contemporaneous with him are in an equal position. For those who lived in the era of the god, or close to the era, it was probably easier to become aware of the scandalous character of the fact of the god-man. But this state of awareness was no essential advantage, since from this state it was possible to leap to offense just as well as to faith. For those who have temporal distance to the appearance of the god, a lot of chatter has

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995 PF, 99–100 / SV1 IV, 262.
996 PF, 100 / SV1 IV, 263.
997 PF, 104 / SV1 IV, 266.
998 PF, 100 / SV1 IV, 263.
999 PF, 93 / SV1 IV, 256.
come in between them that makes it difficult for them to really become aware of the fact.\textsuperscript{1000} On the other hand, the later generations might have been considered to have an advantage in that they have the magnificent consequences of the fact before their eyes. Climacus points out, however, that the consequences that are built on the self-contradictory paradox and that come through generations of fallible human beings do not make it any easier for the person with common sense to believe in this fact. It is just as paradoxical to believe on the basis of them as on the basis of immediate contemporaneity.\textsuperscript{1001} Hence, it is equally difficult and equally easy for everyone to receive the condition. Equally difficult, since everyone needs to accept the risk and terror that building one’s eternal happiness on something historical inevitably implies, and no one can do more to overcome that terror than put one’s faith in the god. Equally easy, since that is also all that one needs to do: one just has to rely on the faith that one receives from the god.\textsuperscript{1002} The result is that “all are essentially equal,” and so it must be, since it is the god himself who acts as the reconciler. Climacus writes: “Would he bring about a reconciliation with some human beings such that their reconciliation with him would make their difference from all others blatantly flagrant [himmelraabende]? That would indeed bring conflict.”\textsuperscript{1003}

Hence, within the total difference that the individuals are now related to the god in time, \textit{the Socratic relation} between human individuals returns. Even within the Christian paradigm B the point is to acquire and continually to preserve this Socratic understanding “that one human being, insofar as he is a believer, is not indebted to someone else for something but is indebted to the god

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\textsuperscript{1000} PF, 71 / SV\textsuperscript{1} IV, 234.
\textsuperscript{1001} PF, 94–98 / SV\textsuperscript{1} IV, 257–261.
\textsuperscript{1002} PF, 98–99 and 106–107 / SV\textsuperscript{1} IV, 261 and 268.
\textsuperscript{1003} PF, 105–106 / SV\textsuperscript{1} IV, 267–268.
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In other words, Christians are in no debt for their faith to the apostles, martyrs, saints, bishops, or reformers, since each and everyone of them is equally in debt to the god. But the Socratic equality does not only mean that everyone is equal and no one is higher than the others, it also means that no one has power or authority to do more for the others than to provide them with the occasion of faith. All that a contemporary disciple of the god may do is to testify for his faith in the following manner: “I believe and have believed that this happened, although it is foolishness to the understanding and an offense to the human heart.” Then the contemporary disciple may recount the content of the purported fact. This is in fact no communication (Meddelelse) of faith, it merely gives an occasion for someone who comes later to believe, but this is all that the contemporary may do for the others.1005

Moreover, from the Socratic relationship it follows that whether or not the contemporary actually has, or had, the faith, cannot concern those for whom he passes the occasion to believe, since anyway they need to receive the faith directly from the god in order to believe, and once they have received the faith, they have the autopsy of faith and do not need to rely on the visions of the others. Neither are the details of the fact of concern for them, since the heart of the matter is the world-historical nota bene “that in such and such a year the god appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us, and then died.” Climacus argues that this already gives an occasion for someone who comes later to receive the faith from the god.1006

1005 PF, 102 / SV I IV, 264–265.
1006 PF, 102–104 / SV I IV, 264–266.
5.2 The Irrationality of Basic Christian Dogmas?

The Concept of Anxiety and Philosophical Fragments describe the dramatic events that form the basis of the dogmas of sin and faith. On the other hand, these works also interpret those events in the light of sin-consciousness and faith. Let us now analyze this Christian interpretation of the fall and of the reception of faith. The analysis will help us to understand how the Christian individual becomes situated and how he situates himself in life. At the same time it brings out how his orientation in life differs from commonsense, scientific, and philosophical orientations in life, and also how it differs from the ethical-religious orientation represented by Judge William.

We shall concentrate on the following three issues:

1) What is the method of Vigilius and Climacus in interpreting the fall and the reception of faith?
2) What grounds could they give for the view that human beings are in sin, i.e. that human beings are fundamentally in untruth?
3) What grounds could they give for building one’s life on faith despite its paradoxical nature?

5.2.1 Imaginative Understanding and Passionate Transitions

The Concept of Anxiety and Philosophical Fragments bring out the sources of basic Christian dogmas by combining a moment of artistic and conceptual distancing with a moment of empathic appropriation. While the first moment opens up possibilities, the second aims at making these possibilities concrete and actual for the reader.

The method goes hand in hand with the assumption that certain historical events that decide our eternal happiness. These historical events are approached through the stories of the Bible. Since the events are assumed to have eternal and universal signifi-
cance, the message that is read out of the stories is considered as eternally valid and universal. The stories do not convey their message to us directly, however. In order to appropriate what is universal in the particular events, we must first distil the ideal possibilities out of the stories, or, to use an expression of Vigilius Haufniensis, we must “infinitize them in the form of infinity.” This is what the moment of artistic and conceptual distancing achieves. By having recourse to it Vigilius Haufniensis and Johannes Climacus read the stories unashamedly as fables and circumvent the troubles of objective historical research. Like the other pseudonyms and like Kierkegaard in his religious discourses, they take the liberty to vary the stories of the Bible and to clarify their content poetically with the help of analogies. Moreover, they write consistently in the poetic, subjunctive mood and never stop to ponder whether in the historical actuality there really were such events as the fall of Adam or the appearance of the god in Christ. The use of the poetical method in clarifying the content of the events does not mean, however, that the historical actuality of the events would be denied. Rather, the method is a means to clarify what is essential in that actuality. In other words, the method serves to clarify what Climacus later in Postscript calls “existence-

1007 CA, 157 / SV1 IV, 423.
1008 Consider, for example, what the serpent of Eden has to suffer in the hands of Vigilius (CA, 48 / SV1 IV, 318–319), how the anxiety of Adam receives clarification through a comparison with the anxiety of child (CA, 41–42 / SV1 IV, 313–314), or how the Christian is compared with the pagan and Judaic (CA, 93–110 / SV1 IV, 363–378). Or consider how Climacus clarifies the need for the incarnation by considering exaltation of the disciple as an alternative to it (PF, 29–30 / SV1 IV, 197–198), or how he clarifies the Christian with the help of the Socratic throughout his treatise. Both authors clarify the object of their research by a systematic comparison of different possibilities that they illustrate with literary means—by an overview of the “poetical space” that the alternative possibilities make up.
communication,” i.e. the ethical-religious message for us that the events contain. This goal is what justifies the poetic method. The Biblical stories are presented as *fabula* so that the reader can take into consideration that *de te fabula narratur* ("the story is told about you"), i.e. so that he could appropriate personally what is essential in the story.

Hence, the second moment is the moment of empathic appropriation. This is not a straightforward but a dialectical process. In *The Concept of Anxiety* Vigilius Haufniensis criticizes, on the one hand, the way of reading the Bible, in which one’s own actuality is disregarded, on the other hand, the way in which the individuals give up their original relation to infinitude and just imitate the finite models. The point is that the starting point for personal

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1010 Cf. *CA*, 73 / *SVI* IV, 342–343 that was quoted above.
1011 Vigilius writes: "In beginning a deliberation, a person has certain classical passages fixed in his mind, and now his explanation and knowledge consists in an arrangement of these passages, as if the whole matter were something foreign to him. [Instead of this, t]he more natural the better, even if he is willing with all deference to refer the explanation to the verdict of the Bible, and, if it is not in accord with the Bible, to try over again. Thus a person does not bring himself into the awkward position of having to understand the explanation before he has understood what it should explain, nor into the subtle position of using Scripture passages as the Persian king in the war against the Egyptians used their sacred animals, that is, in order to shield himself." (*CA*, 40 / *SVI* IV, 312. Translation slightly altered.)
1012 Vigilius writes: "So when in dealing with the concept of faith the historical is made so one-sidedly significant that the primitive originality of faith in the individual is overlooked, faith becomes a finite pettiness instead of a free infinitude. The consequence is that faith may be regarded in the manner of Hieronymus in Holberg’s play, when he says about Erasmus Montanus that he has heretical views of faith because he believes that the earth is round and not flat, as one generation after another in the village had believed. Thus a person might become a heretic in his faith by wearing wide pants when everyone in the village wears tight pants." (*CA*, 62 / *SVI* IV, 332–333.)
appropriation must be one’s own existence. The stories of the Bible become understandable only in the light of one’s own spiritual situation: the stories tell about how the finite and infinite, the temporal and eternal may be brought together in ethical-religious existence only for the individual, who investigates them in the light of his own actual ethical-religious existence. Thus, the methodical principles gnōthi seauton (“know yourselves”) and unum noris omnes hold: we are able to understand what happens to others only in the light of what we know of ourselves. Because Climacus holds to these principles in Philosophical Fragments he is able to surmise what takes place both in the minds and in the hearts of the teachers and disciples of his poems. Because Vigilius holds to these principles in The Concept of Anxiety, he is able to put his soul into the Genesis story of the first sin and to maintain that the story is not just a myth, but gives the only “dialectically consistent view” on how sin enters in the world through our lives. What the story points to is namely an event that the individual may have acquaintance with only on the basis of his own life history. Accordingly, if the individual does not have what we may call either an “anthropological,” “phenomenological,” or “existential” approach to the interpretation of the story—if he does not interpret what meets him in the story on the basis of his own existence—he will fall into philosophical and theological speculation and miss the concrete individual actuality, where the dogmas have their meaning and truth. The truth of the dogmas of sin and revelation does not depend on the subject, but without the subjective approach they do not apply to the actuality of the sub-

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1013 *CA*, 79 / *SV* IV, 347.
1014 *CA*, 32 / *SV* IV, 304.
1015 See Malantschuk 1971b, 9–21
ject. And yet, it is the concrete actuality of the subject that they aim to explain, clarify, and transform.\footnote{Cf. the passage from Kierkegaard’s early Journals and Papers: “The trouble with philosophers in respect to Christianity is that they use continental maps when they ought to use special large-scale maps, for every dogma is nothing but a more concrete extension of the universally human consciousness.” (JP 3, 3273 / Pap. II A 440.) The way the dogmas extend the concrete human consciousness is explained in another passage: “One can discern that faith is a more concrete qualification than immediacy, because from a purely human point of view the secret of all knowledge is to concentrate upon what is given in immediacy; in faith we assume something which is not given and can never be deduced from the preceding consciousness—that is, the consciousness of sin and the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. Yet this assurance does not come about in the same way as knowledge arises out of doubt by way of an internal consequence, and everyone would certainly sense the frivolity of conceiving of it in this way, or, to put it better, one who conceives of it in this way does not have the above-mentioned position (consciousness of sin); it is rather a free act. Consciousness of sin, however, is not at all an arbitrary human act, which doubt is. It is an objective act, simply because the consciousness of God is immanent within the consciousness of sin. It is for this reason that the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins is linked to an external event, the appearance of Christ in his fullness, which is, indeed, not external in the sense of being foreign to us, of no concern to us, but external as being historical.” (JP 2, 1100 / Pap. III A 39.)}

At the same time it is true that there is no objective and inter-subjectively controllable way to ascertain that the historical events, on which faith and the consciousness of sin depend, have actually taken place the way the believer believes. Since Climacus and Vigilius operate with fables, with imaginary possibilities, and with the subjective appropriation of them, it is clear that the empiricist ideals of verification or falsification do not apply. But neither is there any deductive demonstration on what must have taken place and what must take place in the sphere of freedom as a rationalist would expect. Thus, it is clear that the research methods of Climacus and Vigilius do not accord with the scientific standards. But the discrepancy is as it should be and it does not mean that
their methods would due to it become inappropriate and fail to clarify what they aim to clarify, namely, the sphere of freedom. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Climacus argues for the correctness of the method of Vigilius to investigate sin from the subjective point of view. His point is that the movements that pertain to the individual ethical-religious existence cannot find their place in scientific systems. Climacus writes: “Therefore it was good that the work was a psychological inquiry, which in itself makes clear that sin cannot find a place in the system, presumably just like immortality, faith, the paradox, and other such concepts that are essentially related to existing, just what systematic thinking ignores.”

The free “qualitative leaps” of sin and faith cannot become objects of the science, which investigates the states of the world and the necessary relations between them only. It is thus understandable that Johannes Climacus and Vigilius Haufniensis, just like Judge William, prefer to remain laymen and outsiders on the margins of science.

This does not mean, however, that Vigilius and Climacus would leap into arbitrary subjectivism and give up consistent thinking. On the contrary, they keep reflecting the relations between phenomena and keep trying to make sense of them with the help of a consistent life-view. In their treatises understanding informed by passion and imagination consistently clarifies the individual life that takes place in the historical actuality. Both Vigilius and Climacus also try to explain and justify their approach to the citizens of the republics of common sense, understanding, and science.

In his “Introduction” of *The Concept of Anxiety*, Vigilius presents a whole theory of science in order to justify the imaginative and empathic method that he uses in investigating the psychic

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1018 *CUP, 269 / SVI VII, 228.*

1019 *See PF, 106 / SVI IV, 268 and CA, 8 / SVI IV, 280.*
background of the spiritual leap of sin. Later in the book he gives an argument on why modern science can never grasp the concrete self that is a synthesis of the universal and particular:

[Although there have lived countless millions of such “selves,” no science can say what the self is without again stating it quite generally. And this is the wonder of life, that each man who is mindful of himself knows what no science knows, since he knows who he himself is, and this is the profundity of the Greek saying *gnothi seauton*, which too long has been understood in the German way as pure self-consciousness, the airiness of idealism. It is about to understand it in the Greek way, and then again as the Greeks would have understood it if they had possessed Christian presuppositions.]

What Climacus writes in the “Interlude” of *Philosophical Fragments* about the apprehension of the historical may be regarded as an application of this intuition to the syntheses of the universal and particular that take place through the activity of others in the historical actuality outside the subject. If at the core of the historical actuality are these free syntheses, that is, the coming into existence that takes place by freedom, then the core of history cannot be comprehended by objective, impartial science that regards all transitions as necessary. The free resolutions that synthesize the universal with the particular, the possible with the actual, and the eternal with the temporal, can be grasped only by corresponding free resolutions, by the resolutions of belief. Understanding may use and should use its “algebra” in clarifying different possibilities, but what takes place in actuality and the actual apprehension of it remains a matter of free, passionate transitions.

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1022 PF, 73–86 / SV I, 236–249, esp. PF, 78 n / SV I, 241–242 n, where Climacus argues against Hegel’s philosophy of history.
Thus, it is the nature of the subjective and historical actuality itself that dictates the mode of apprehension: because coming into existence takes place through imaginative understanding and passionate transitions, its apprehension also requires combining a moment of artistic and conceptual distancing with a moment of passionate resolution. In their treatises Vigilius and Climacus themselves abstain from passionate resolutions and remain neutral. But in order to understand what takes place in the assumed events, they have to use empathy: they have to “incline and bend [themselves] to other people and imitate their attitudes,” \(^\text{1023}\) imitate in themselves “every mood, every...state that [they] discovers in [others].” \(^\text{1024}\)

In actual historical events, and therefore also in the appropriation of them that likewise is an historical event, imaginative understanding is combined with affect-determined, but free transitions. For example, the decisive events that concern Christianity, the fall in sin, becoming offended, and the reception of faith all take place in this way. In the imaginatively interpreted situations that precede these transitions, the individual is at his limits and faces the unknown in an affective state, i.e. in a state of anxiety or in a state of Socratic wonder. Then the transition takes place so that the individual either has recourse to the finite world (the fall) or to his own capacities (offense), or has recourse to the passion that the god offers to him (faith). In other words, either the individual renounces the possibility that disturbs his nature and, in

\(^{1023}\) CA, 54–55 / SV1 IV, 325.

\(^{1024}\) CA, 55 / SV1 IV, 326. It follows from the views that Vigilius and Climacus present, however, that as actual human individuals they should not remain neutral, but make also their own personal choice. Thus, the “lightness of being” characteristic to the self-portraits in the prefaces of their works seems to be just an incognito that they assume when communicating. In the inwardness behind it, there is bound to be a lot that does not appear (directly) on the surface, at least the sadness typical to the humorist.
consequence, falls into finitude or becomes offended. Or, motivated by that “happy passion” of faith, he chooses the most uncertain of all possibilities and through this choice attains earnest inwardness and certainty.

Like historical events in general, these historical events take place in relation to other historical events. With the exception of the fall of the first man, the fall of the individual always takes place in relation to the fall of the other members of the race. Offense takes place as a reaction to the appearance of the god and has as its background the ordinary historical events and the traditional interpretation of them, in the light of which the appearance of the god is scandalous, offending. The reception of faith also takes place as a reaction to the appearance of the god and as a reaction against sin, which the appearance of the god had made the individual recollect.

In all of these events, the individual also situates himself anew into the historical world, thereby opening and closing possibilities for himself. In The Concept of Anxiety we learned how the fall posited sinfulness into the world and made the individual see “devils” everywhere. As we will see in subdivision 6.1, by becoming offended the individual becomes inclosed in despair. And although this is not much elaborated in Philosophical Fragments the rebirth in faith also reshapes the historical world in the eyes of the believer. We will come to this later in subdivision 5.3 and in chapters 6 and 7.

Finally, all these historical transitions, just as the transition of first love and the transition of the ethical choice that were described in Either/Or, Part II, take place in the sphere of freedom, where reason and critical reflection participate, but not as rulers. In the transitions themselves reason and reflection are more like passengers than drivers. The acts of sin, offense, and faith take

\[1025\] PF, 49–50 / SVI IV, 218.
place in an actual situation, where one has to choose “either/or,” and there is no way to escape this situation into abstraction, for this escape itself equals making a certain choice in the situation—the choice of offense or pneumatic anxiety. Indeed, in the view of Vigilius and Climacus the attempt to escape from the actual ethical-religious existence to the abstract reasoning and reflection is sin.

But if reasoning and critical reflection and becoming dominated by them is even judged to be sin, the unavoidable rejoinder from their part must be that such passionate transitions, such “qualitative leaps,” are irrational and, therefore, blind and irresponsible. How could Vigilius and Climacus defend their insistence on these passionate transitions against such a rejoinder?

In part, their possible defense has already been expressed above. First, the concrete, situated existence of the individual is more primary than all critical, intersubjective, scientific reflection, and as long as the human being exists in time, there just is no way to avoid making existential choices and taking risks. But, second, ethical-religious and Christian orientation in life is not more blind and irresponsible than the orientation that relies on the generalizations of reason and on critical reflection, which always comes too late and never manages to get in step with what is happening in temporal actuality at the moment. On the one hand, the religious person also reflects and uses his understanding in order to live a purposeful and consequent life. On the other hand, the person who reasons and calculates is not just thereby responsible and on the level of his personal existence. Does a philistine, who prudently adjusts himself to the prevailing social order whatever it happens to be, bear personal responsibility for what he does? And is an absent-minded professor necessarily on the level of his actual existence? Perhaps, with regard to the consequent and responsible life-orientation, it would be, in some sense of the word, rational to acknowledge that there is such an “unthing” as individual ethical-
religious existence, where passionate transitions between the eternal and temporal, the infinite and finite, and the possible and actual take place in an ambiguous state of uncertainty?

However, this defense would still only do as a defense for the ethical-religious way of living poetically described in *Either/Or*. It vindicates the stance of Judge William against the philistine way of life and against abstract philosophy alike. But, to bring out the rationale of the Christian way of living poetically, we must also consider the irrationality of its basic elements, the consciousness of sin and faith in Christ.

### 5.2.2 Subjectivity as Untruth

Let us first consider the presupposition that we are in untruth due to sin. This is the presupposition contrary to the one that, according to Climacus, lies at the basis of Greek philosophy: while Socrates and his followers assume that fundamentally human beings are in truth and good, the dogma of sin claims that fundamentally human beings are in untruth and evil.\(^{1026}\)

According to Vigilius, for the Greek ethical consciousness sin is “what error is for the knowledge of it—the particular exception that proves nothing.”\(^{1027}\) To interpret, what Christians would diagnose as sin, weakness of the will, for example, Greek philosophers regard as something accidental and take a rational attitude toward it: why should a reasonable person concern himself with accidental exceptions and be worried about them? What good would, for example, worrying about one’s irrational traits and repenting for one’s past mistakes do for one, to say nothing of worrying about the irrational traits in others and repenting their faults? A person is better off if he concentrates in his tasks at hand,

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\(^{1027}\) *CA*, 19 / *SI* IV, 292.
if he does not let what is beyond his power disturb his mind, but just concentrates on living in accordance with reason here and now the best he can. In this way he may eventually be able to tame the irrational part of his soul and bring it into harmony with his reason, but if he gives himself to wild passions, he may as well bid farewell to reason and harmony. This seems to be a typical rational attitude that characterizes not only Greek philosophy, but also Western rationality in general. But while it helps to overcome the negative phenomena of life, it also divides existence into a rational and an irrational part, and while the human being comes to feel himself at home with the former, he becomes detached from the latter. The Kierkegaardian critique is that the result is a person with an abstract self, who has his life in the sphere of abstractions and becomes alienated from the concrete, passion-determined temporal actuality to which he all the same belongs, whether he likes it or not.

Against this abstract form of existence Judge William posits his concrete ethical subjectivity in *Either/Or*. The optimistic ethicist believes that a human individual is able to choose himself ethically as a concrete human being and, by repenting the sins of his own and his fathers, to become one with the history and with the totality of ethical beings, to which he belongs. The judge writes about hereditary sin and acknowledges the existence of obscure forces in the subject, but against these he pits his absolute ethical choice and the steady ethical striving that comes after it. He regards what he calls hereditary sin simply as an ethical challenge that he must tackle. In the face of it he does not give up his belief in the ultimate victory of the good and in the constant increase of the beauty of the ethical life. He does not acknowledge that inordinate desires or, for example, sexuality as a drive that has its...
own *telos* could create insurmountable obstacles for the realization of the good and the beautiful.

The concept of sin that meets us in *The Concept of Anxiety* is of another kind. As a total determinant of human existence, sin now turns out to be an insurmountable obstacle to ethical striving and repentance and, in consequence, fatal for the ethical project of living poetically. According to Vigilius Haufniensis, ethics suffers a shipwreck upon sin. In the struggle to actualize the task of ethics, sin shows itself “as something that withdraws deeper and deeper as a deeper and deeper presupposition, as a presupposition that goes beyond the individual.”

On the pages of *The Concept of Anxiety* sin spreads itself out in the history, society, and even in the inhuman world, impregnating through and through the situation of the *individuum*, who is simultaneously himself and his race. Sin manifests itself in anxiety, selfishness, sexuality, spiritlessness, bondage of will, and demonic defiance. In itself it is like that metaphysical vortex that the Greek speculation had to presuppose, “a moving something that no science can grasp,” or like “the burning tow” that admired men of science seek together with their devout congregation, without noticing that it is all the time burning in their own hands. Although sin has no place in science, this is just part of its nature: to avoid becoming objectified as a state, to hide itself from the eyes of the observer and, at the same time, to posit itself as actuality again and again.

1032. *C.A.,* 14–15 / *SV/I IV, 286–287. In other words, Vigilius suggests that sin is the basic “vortex” that constitutes the human situation. It resides in the “leap” that the spirit makes and, thus, it seems to be too close to human spirit to become an object of cognition: every cognition already takes place in sin. To get further clarification for these views, we may read what Kierkegaard wrote about sin a few years later in his *Journals and Papers* under the title “Augustinus”: “What is so often advanced as an excuse for man’s sin—namely, weakness, ignorance, being overpowered by the sensate, etc.—Augustinus turns quite
Is this presupposition, the presupposition that we are in sin and therefore in untruth, an irrational presupposition? From the manly rationalistic point of view the presupposition seems somewhat hysterical and exaggerating. At least potentially it has a paralyzing effect on the ethical will and ethical use of reason: it frustrates the rational efforts to lead a good life. However, as such the presupposition of sin is not more irrational than the Platonic assumption that fundamentally we are in the good. It is just an opposite hypothesis: one may as well assume that one is fundamentally in evil as assume that one is fundamentally in the good. In a certain sense it even seems to be a better hypothesis in that it helps to explain the position in which the subject finds himself when he begins to strive ethically: the subject has an ethical task to synthesize, because he is already split as a result of sin. "Thus, one could argue that the hypothesis of sin has more explanatory power than the Platonic one and that, in this respect at least, it is the more rational one. Admittedly, the explanation in itself is unexplainable, inasmuch as sin as an expression of human freedom posits itself, is its own presupposition, and allows no further explanations." But then again, all explanation must stop somewhere and with the help of the concept of sin, science has at least taken one step further in its project of "saving the phenomena?" masterfully when he says that far from being a defense or an explanation of sin it is much more the punishment of sin; sin is not to be explained as a result of this weakness, this eclipse of the understanding—no, this is to be explained as a result of sin, the punishment of sin. "We do not call sin only that which is generally called sin in the most essential and rigorous sense—namely voluntary and conscious fault, but we call everything sin which is a necessary result of such a fault and thus is its punishment." See Böhringer, I, pt. 3, p. 408. Böhringer is correct in saying that Augustine interprets the relation in such a way that the particular will is not external to but enclosed within the condition in which the person finds himself." (JP 4, 4047 / Pap. X 4 A 173.)

1033 CA, 48–49 / SV1 IV, 319.
1034 CA, 21–22 and 32 / SV1 IV, 294 and 304.
But to this a rationalist scientist or philosopher must certainly reply that the Platonic hypothesis is by definition the rational one and the hypothesis opposite to it must be irrational. For is it not clearly rational to rely on one’s reason and quite irrational, and self-contradictory from the part of a rational being, to give up the conviction that basically one knows what the truth is. The latter procedure is like cutting the very branch of the tree on which one is actually sitting; and besides, how does one know the truth about one’s untruth, if one is the untruth and does not know the truth? What can one trust, if one cannot trust one’s reason that one constantly relies on?

To tackle this rejoinder we must first note that the hypothesis of sin does not deny that reason and goodness are there at the basis of all being. Vigilius and Climacus do not deny that there exists a good and reasonable almighty being, on whom we may trust, on whose logos we may put our faith and hope. When it comes to this issue, Vigilius and Climacus appear to be as rational as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Hegel, and much more rational than a major part of modern scientists and philosophers today. Hence, the issue of rationality between Vigilius and Climacus and the representatives of the Socratic tradition does not concern the trust on the divine and eternal logos, but concerns only the reliance on human reason in the quest to participate in that logos. The issue also concerns the method through which the concrete and passionate human individual becomes conscious of his untruth and finds the truth. In other words: if the hypothesis is correct, if the person is in the state of untruth and unfreedom, how does he manage to reach the truth? How does he make a leap, which would not be a leap of sin and which would lead into the restitution of freedom and the good? And first of all, how does he attain consciousness of sin, if he is in sin and if sin is like a vortex that remains constantly hidden?
Chapter 5: The Concept of Anxiety and Philosophical Fragments

Certainly not through abstract reason only. A necessary prerequisite is, at least, that there is personal ethical-religious interest for the good, truth, and freedom in the individual.\textsuperscript{1035} If the individual has this interest, if he strives ethically and understands his striving in religious terms, he may become conscious of his guilt before God and this consciousness anticipates in turn the consciousness of sin.\textsuperscript{1036} However, according to Vigilius, the full con-

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\item Vigilius and Climacus do not underscore that such personal interest is required, but here and there in their texts its necessity comes out. Vigilius assumes the ethical-religious interest, for example, in his “Introduction,” where he claims that ethics “presents itself as a task for every man (\textit{CA}, 18 / \textit{SV1 IV}, 290–291).” In his analysis of the anxiety about the good he likewise assumes that the will for freedom, truth, and good is there in each individual. This will explains why the demonic person comes out of his inclosing reserve, when he is touched by the good from without. What happens is, namely, that “freedom, which underlies unfreedom or is its ground, by entering into communication with freedom from without, revolts and now betrays the unfreedom…” This polyphonic event shows that the demonic has “two wills, one subordinate and impotent that wills revelation and one stronger that wills inclosing reserve.” (\textit{CA}, 123 and 129 / \textit{SV1 IV}, 391 and 396.) Finally, Vigilius requires the personal interest for freedom and truth in his analysis of the pneumatic forms of the demonic anxiety. There he maintains that “truth is for the particular individual only as he himself produces it in action” and “if the truth is for the individual in any other way…we have a phenomenon of the demonic.” Thus, “certitude and inwardness, which can be attained only by and in action, determine whether or not the individual is demonic.” (\textit{CA}, 138–139 / \textit{SV1 IV}, 405.) In order to have certitude and inwardness, the individual must understand the truth concretely by appropriating it personally. (\textit{CA}, 142–151 / \textit{SV1 IV}, 408–417.) The personal ethical-religious interest is implied also in \textit{Philosophical Fragments}. In the beginning of the first chapter of his book, Climacus notes that Socrates was interested in the issue of how a person can learn the truth, because he was interested in knowing whether virtue allows itself to be learnt (\textit{hvovviðt kan Dyden Lere}) and virtue in turn was defined as insight (\textit{PF}, 9 / \textit{SV1 IV}, 179).

\item Vigilius refers to this in his “Introduction,” when he writes that “in the struggle to actualize the task of ethics, sin shows itself.” (\textit{CA}, 19 / \textit{SV1 IV}, 291.) Like Climacus later in \textit{Postscript}, Vigilius seems to regard the sense of total guilt
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Consciousness of sin “is first posited by Christianity.” Climacus confirms this view: to become actually conscious of his sin, the individual must first encounter the teacher; it is the encounter with the god who is the truth that makes the individual recollect that he is in the state of untruth. Thus, the second necessary prerequisite for the consciousness of sin, and for the learning of the truth, is this encounter. How the teacher comes to be the occasion for the disciple to recollect his untruth, Climacus does not explain. We may consider his teaching, his personal conduct of life, and his lot in the hands of men together as creating the occasion. Of these Climacus seems to put most emphasis on the humble life of the god, since he states that “the presence of the god in human form—indeed, in the lowly form of a servant—is precisely in front of God as the intermediary between the ethical and Christian existence. Anxiety of guilt in Judaism and in a religious genius paves way for the Christian consciousness of sin and faith in the reconciliation. (CA, 103–110 and 161–162 / SVI IV, 372–378 and 427–428.) In Philosophical Fragments the parallel progression from the ethical-religious quest for the truth, through a sense of guilt, to the consciousness of sin lets itself be surmised in what Climacus writes about Socrates in his chapter on “The Absolute Paradox.” There he describes how Socrates, in his paradoxical passion to know the unknown, came to wonder whether he resembles the monster Typhon or whether there is something divine in him. Climacus explains that this uncertainty was caused by the lack of consciousness of sin. (PF, 38–39 and 47 / SVI IV, 206 and 214.)

1037 CA, 93 / SVI IV, 363.
1038 PF, 14 and 47 / SVI IV, 184 and 214.
1039 PF, 55 / SVI IV, 222. Also in his synopsis of what was essential in the event of Christ’s appearance, in his “world-historical nota bene,” Climacus passes by the doctrine that the god proclaimed and mentions just that “the god appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us, and then died.” (PF, 104 / SVI IV, 266.) In the later writings of Kierkegaard, it is the betrayal and suffering of Christ that makes the individual aware of the depth of his sin. For example, in the discourse on 1 Corinthians 11:23 in Christian Discourses (Christelige Taler, 1848) it is the circumstance that every single individual be-

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Another question that neither Climacus nor Vigilius answers directly is how we come to know that each and every individual is bound to sin, i.e. that sin is universal. If we disregard the testimony of Paul in Romans 5:12–21 (and we may note that Vigilius himself refutes the idea that the fall of Adam would directly and automatically make all the member of human race into sinners\(^a\)), how do we know that, for example, the lack of sin-consciousness in a spiritless person is actually due to sin, as Vigilius claims, and not due to him really being without sin?\(^b\) Is this also recollected? Apparently it cannot be, since through recollection I come to know only what is in myself. Rather, the universality of sin seems to be a dogmatic assumption based on Christology: since Christ came to save every member of the human race, everyone must be in need of salvation; \textit{ergo}, everyone must be in sin.\(^c\) But

\(^a\) That this is at least a Kierkegaardian view is confirmed by an entry that Kierkegaard wrote in his \textit{Journals and Papers} the year 1850: "On closer inspec-
this just gives rise to a further question: how do we know that Christ came to save every member of the race and that we are all guilty for his suffering? In arguing that we are all guilty for the suffering and death of Christ, Kierkegaard first describes in Christian Discourses (Christelige Taler, 1848) the events in the night that Christ was betrayed. Then he claims: it was not just “a few individuals who attacked and killed him; nor was it that generation that crucified him—it was the human race, and we certainly do belong to that if we are human beings at all, and in this way we are indeed present if we are human beings at all.”

But why was it the whole human race and not just those contemporaries of his that are guilty of his suffering and that he came to redeem?

As far as I know, neither Vigilius, nor Climacus, nor Kierkegaard makes an attempt to demonstrate this. If we disregard the great commission in Matthew 28:16–20 which, anyway, does not state that all human individuals bear the guilt for the suffering of Christ, we may find the basis for this conviction in the faith that Christ was the god. Imagine that the god, he who sustains heaven and earth by his omnipotent word, appeared as a humble servant here on the earth and died just for the sake of some evil people of that time, just in order to redeem these few contrite ones that could not help themselves, but were really in need of salvation. The basis of the world, the basis on which each of us exists at every moment, is crucified and dies, and this event, an event that

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1043 CD, 278 / SV1 X, 288.
1044 See PF, 32 / SVI IV, 200.
made even the inanimate nature to react passionately,\textsuperscript{1045} took place only for the sake of a handful chosen ones. This would seem a bit strange, to say the least. Consequently, Christ died for the sake of all of us, which means that we are all guilty of his suffering and death and sinners without any other hope than his mercy.

At least in my mind, this \textit{reductio ad absurdum} is consequent and rational enough, and we may conclude that faith in the divinity of Christ posits the universality of sin. But this, of course, raises the further question of the rationality of this faith.

\subsection{5.2.3 Paradoxes of Faith}

In the paradigm of recollection, understanding remains in immanence and within its limits. When Climacus pits against this paradigm the Christian paradigm, where understanding carried by the paradoxical passion transcends its limits and then surrenders itself to the passion of faith, he makes no attempt to belittle the irrational elements in Christianity. On the contrary, he does his best to make the Christian paradigm appear as paradoxical and as contrary to human understanding as possible.

First of all, Climacus emphasizes what we could call the \textit{ontological paradox}: the paradoxical duplexity of the nature of the god-man. He emphasizes it by poetic descriptions that make the reader reflect on what it must have been like in concrete everyday life, if this human being really was the god.\textsuperscript{1046} It should be noted that it

\textsuperscript{1045} See \textit{CUP}, 279 / \textit{SV1} VII, 238.

\textsuperscript{1046} In fact, in \textit{Philosophical Fragments} Climacus nowhere directly states that the duplexity of nature of the god-man is a paradox. However, from his description it becomes evident that this is his view (see, for example, \textit{PF}, 45–46 / \textit{SV1} IV, 212–214). Moreover, in \textit{Postscript} it is precisely “the dialectical contradiction” that “the eternal has come to into existence at a moment of time” that is claimed to be “paradoxical” (see \textit{CUP}, 570 and 578–581 / \textit{SV1} VII, 497 and 504–507).
is not only for the offended understanding that this paradox appears as a paradox. According to Climacus, even after the person has received the passion of faith, the paradox remains incomprehensible to his understanding: when the disciple comes “to an understanding with this paradox,” he does not understand the paradox, he understands only “that this is the paradox,” i.e. that he is really confronting something that defies his understanding. The point of Climacus seems to be that, while we may have faith in Christ as the Lord and Savior, we cannot really think of Jesus of Nazareth as the god—the paradox of the god-man is impossible to think through concretely.\textsuperscript{1048} And here Climacus, at least to my mind, appears to be right: truly it seems impossible to understand how a spirit such as God’s (all-wise, perfectly good, etc.) could be at the same time a spirit of a human individual, and how the god could be identical with this man of flesh and blood here, this finite, temporal, and mortal being. Here two beings of absolutely different quality are thought to exist, thought to think and act in one and the same person.

But the double nature of the god-man is not the only paradox involved. According to Climacus, the appearance of the god is “the absolute paradox,” because it simultaneously brings “into prominence the absolute difference of sin” and wants “to annul this absolute difference in the absolute equality.”\textsuperscript{1049} The life of Christ makes us into trespassers, but at the same time means that all our trespasses are forgiven. Thus, in addition to the ontological paradox, there is the \textit{soteriological paradox} of simultaneous judgment.

\textsuperscript{1047} \textit{PF}, 59 / \textit{SV} I IV, 224.
\textsuperscript{1048} \textit{Cf. CUP}, 580 / \textit{SV} I VII, 506: “Christianity as a proposal \textit{[som Projekt]} is not difficult to understand—the difficulty and the paradox are that it is actual.”
\textsuperscript{1049} \textit{PF}, 47 / \textit{SV} I IV, 214.
and grace, confrontation of which makes the believer simultaneously a sinner and a righteous man.\textsuperscript{1050}

To this paradox is connected a paradox that we could call the \textit{theological paradox}, since it concerns the nature of the god: the life of Christ brings out that the just and immortal god, who punishes sin and who is self-sufficient and sovereign, loves us although we are sinners and needs the love of human beings in return. Climacus turns this paradox into a proof that the “poem” that tells of the love of the god is not a poem at all, but “the wonder”: it could never have arisen in a human heart that the immortal god would need the love of human beings, and this shows that the god himself must be behind the poem.\textsuperscript{1051} As a proof this is, of course, hardly indisputable: why would it be impossible for a weak and desperate person to give this explanation of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth after the event? Moreover, it sounds as if Climacus were claiming that the greater and more fantastic the story or the idea is, the more it breaks against sound human understanding, then the more likely it is to be a wonder. Were this a sufficient criterion for judging what is of God, and what is not, a host of superstitious beliefs and inhuman atrocities should be considered as divine. Rather than convincing the understanding, the “proof” of Climacus thus serves to emphasize the gap between understanding and faith: for the believer, who is willing to give up his understanding, the unexpected and miraculous character of the event goes well together with the thought that the god is behind it—for the skeptic, who holds onto his understanding, the idea of a loving and self-sacrificing god is just something to smile at.

In addition to the above-mentioned ontological and theological paradoxes, there come the epistemological and ethical ones. An

\textsuperscript{1050} I owe the observation that there is a difference between what I call the ontological and the soteriological paradox to a discussion with Jonas Roos in Copenhagen 2006.

\textsuperscript{1051} \textit{PF}, 35–36 / \textit{SI} IV, 203–204.
epistemological paradox is what could be called the paradox of the autopsy of faith. According to Climacus, the external form of the god that the believer perceives is just the same as what a non-believer perceives.\footnote{PF, 63–71 / SV1 IV, 228–234.} The believer “did not see or hear the god directly and immediately but saw a human being in a lowly form who said of himself that he was the god.” There was no distinctive mark that would have distinguished that human being from others, and all talk about the god’s physical comeliness, about his direct and immediate divinity, or about the immediate wondrousness of his acts is nonsense.\footnote{PF, 93 / SV1 IV, 255–256.} However, in faith the apprehension of the god takes place in time in a way analogous to seeing, so that faith perceives in this moment of time (Øieblikket) the fullness of the eternal in time. This is like a sense-perception in that it is a temporal and intentional event that has as its object something that appears in time. But it is a paradoxical perception, which is in contradiction with sense-perceptions, and the one, who has faith, is aware of this, since he knows that what he believes in is in contradiction with what he actually sees with his eyes. The paradoxical character of this vision comes out, if we compare it with the Platonic vision of the beautiful, of the good, and of the one that a philosopher may reach, if he ascends to the top of the ladder of knowledge.\footnote{See, for example, Symposium 210c–212a, Republic 514a–517c, and 7th Epistle 341c–d and 344b.} Instead of the infinite sea of the beautiful, the brightness of the good, and the burning unity of the essential being, the subject perceives here only a finite and temporal human being, who in many respects appears as miserable, fragile, and pitiable—but at the same time he has faith that this particular human being is the god. While the Platonic vision transcends the senses and understanding, this paradoxical vision goes directly against them.
A methodological paradox is the paradox that could be called the *paradox of the leap*. It could be formulated in this way: one is willing to receive faith, only if one has already received faith. Climacus writes that faith is the condition for recognizing the god and that one receives faith from the god himself. But, on the other hand, in order to be happy the encounter of the human understanding with the god must already take place in the happy passion of faith. Otherwise the individual becomes offended. In other words, faith is the precondition for the happy encounter with the god, but on the other hand faith is received from the god only in this encounter. The solution for the problem seems to be that the individual receives faith from the god trusting in his word that he is the god, and then comes to encounter him as the god. But it is hard to understand why the individual would trust the word of the human being in question, if he did not already have faith that he is the god. One might retort that it is the consciousness of sin that creates the need for redeeming and saving faith. However, in order to become conscious of his sin, the teacher must become for the individual an occasion that makes him recollect his sin. But, whether the teacher makes him recollect this through his life or through his preaching, the prerequisite of recollection appears to be that the individual believes that the life or the preaching is absolutely true, and then reflects himself in his relation to this absolute truth. However, it is hard to understand why the individual should believe that this person is the truth, if he does not believe that he is the god? And why should he take his

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1055 PF, 59 / SV I IV, 224.  
1056 PF, 49 and 54 / SV I IV, 215–216 and 220–221.  
1057 Cf. PF, 14–17 / SV I IV, 184–187 with CUP, 279 / SV I VII, 238: “One becomes objective, wants in an objective way to consider Christianity, which as a preliminary takes the liberty of making the considerer a sinner, if there is to be any question at all of getting to see something.” See also JP 4, 4006, 4018, 4050 / Pap IV A 189, X 1 A 113, XI 2 A 14 and JP 2, 1136 / Pap X 2 A 371.
preaching to heart, if he does not believe that he is infallible, full of eternally valid truth, and motivated by divine motives only; in other words, if he does not believe that he is the god? But, instead of believing that, one may as well doubt, naturalize, and explain away all the divine qualities of Jesus Christ and in this way invalidate the divinity of the revelation. Thus, the leap from the ethical-religious to the Christian appears to be a paradox. It resembles the paradox of the transition from the aesthetic to the ethical existence that we considered above in subdivision 3.2.1: the person who lives aesthetically is incapable of making a resolute choice of oneself; thus, in order to make the ethical choice, one must already be ethical.

Finally, the Christian paradigm involves the ethical paradox. This is the paradox that Johannes de silentio brings into focus in Fear and Trembling and that Climacus takes up in “A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature” of Postscript. If the individual is related to the eternal through some temporal instance—through particular visions or dreams, through a singular religious paradigm, or through the god in time—then the universal ethical law that he found within himself must become suspended for him. The ethical that we have within us creates a hidden kinship between us human beings and establishes openness and universality as human ideals. But the paradoxical religiousness renders this sense of kinship problematic, since for a believer it is difficult to feel akin to pagans, who have no relation to Christ, and even more difficult to feel akin to sinners, who do not recognize Jesus as the god and who do not confess their sin against him. Thus, the paradoxical religiousness makes becoming open a project conditional on whether human beings relate in faith to this particular historical instance. There is full openness, understand-

ing, and trust only between believers.\textsuperscript{1060} If universality is ever possible, then it is possible only if all the people eventually become disciples of the god. Even if the individual had faith in this possibility, as Kierkegaard incidentally appears to have had,\textsuperscript{1061} at least temporarily he becomes isolated from the universally human through his paradoxical faith. And yet, in his isolation he must consider his exceptional faith as a higher relation to the god than the obedience to the ethical law that every human being may find in his heart.

With all these paradoxes, then, is not the Christian faith not only suprarational, but \textit{irrational}, and must not all the dogmas based on this faith be deemed irrational? According to Climacus himself, faith signifies certain downfall (\textit{Undergang}) for the understanding.\textsuperscript{1062} Let us concede that Climacus is right in this and let us admit that faith and the basic Christian dogmas are irrational in the sense that they break against our human understanding, make it fall down, take away from reason and understanding the leading position in the spiritual life and hand this position to a paradoxical passion, instead. The question is: does this irrationality mean that faith and adherence to the Christian dogmas would be irresponsible and blind? It would mean this if acting responsibly and with insight would equal following understanding and reason in one’s life. But why should we equate these two? If there is an infinite passion that leads the individual towards the eternal, towards the good, truth, and freedom, why would it be irrational for him to follow this passion instead?

Our reason that bears the Greek, the Latin, and the Enlightenment heritage says that whereas vices are infinite in that they are insatiable, it is virtuous to live according to reason and to keep to the good order that the rule of reason implies. And what holds in

\textsuperscript{1060} See \textit{CUP}, 581–583 / \textit{SVI} \textit{VII}, 507–508.
\textsuperscript{1061} See \textit{Pap}. XI 3 B 57, p. 105 quoted above.
\textsuperscript{1062} \textit{PF}, 47 / \textit{SVI} \textit{IV}, 214–215.
ethics also holds in politics: obedience to law and order based on reason appears to be the only means available to control blind irrational forces in men—violence, wars, racism, diseases, and endless blood vengeance between families, tribes, and nations. Hence, if we want to cultivate nature harmoniously, avoid chaos, and lead a good life, we are better to follow the right measure given by our understanding and use the measures dictated by our reason both in the individual and in the collective life. But, granting there is a lot of sense in this, is it actually wise to surrender one’s life to the rule of limiting and controlling reason, if that implies the negation of the romantic quest for the infinite and the eternal and for the salvation of what is unique and singular in the individual life? Since the quest tends to manifest in one form or another even in the modern enlightened age, might it not be part of the structure of human existence? Could it not be that a human individual is always in a personal and passionate relation to the infinite and eternal anyway, and to break or negate this relation in the name of the good life leads him into contradictions with himself and is ultimately not possible for him at all? If this is the case, should we not rather acknowledge that the quest for the infinite and eternal is there in us, and then look for the Word, logos that is able to meet and address it?

Now, if we admit that there is sense in these counterarguments, we have given an inch to Judge William’s ethical-religious project of living poetically. But once we give an inch to this impassioned project, by its inner consequence it might carry us more than a mile and lead us to the situation where we must either resign the project or keep going and make the leap of faith that presupposes that, with respect to it and its object, we renounce our finite understanding.

The above reading of the pseudonymous works published by Kierkegaard has attempted to point out the situation in which the leap of faith makes sense and fulfills a purpose, namely, the situa-
tion that results from the consistent attempt to live the ethical-religious life in this world. In The Concept of Anxiety Vigilius claims that the ethical-religious individual is torn apart in its consciousness of guilt and in the futile and fruitless acts of repentance until he receives faith and, in consequence, attains full awareness and certainty of his hereditary sin.  

Going through Postscript we found a much more thorough account of how the ethical-religious project comes to a dead end in the face of the negative phenomena of religious suffering and guilt that pertain to Religiousness A. There Climacus described how, due to these phenomena, the religious individual was unable to become open in the world. In the external world he acted as any other ethical individual, but in his inwardness he suffered in his relation to God, and there was no point of reference in the actuality external to him that would have made his suffering and guilt understandable for others. At the same time, as an existing individual who is bound to have his life in the changeable world, he was not able to relate absolutely to his eternal happiness and to God, either.

In this situation one option was to establish distance from the ethical-religious existence and to give up the idea that one becomes brought up by God in the historical actuality. This was the option chosen by the humorous individual, who escaped into recollection as he saw no meaning in existence and no way to live forward. However, as a climax of the project of leading ethical-religious life, humor appears as an absurd anti-climax. In this situation, having recourse to faith does make much more sense as it enables the individual to hold onto his project. In faith the individual relates to the absolute and to his eternal happiness through the changeable historical actuality. Thanks to faith, he has also something positive before and ahead of him, and the relation to

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this enables him to tackle anew the negativity that he must struggle with in historical actuality.

Thus, even if Climacus does not point this out himself, if one thinks of it, it is obvious that, despite all its irrationality, faith is \textit{functional} for the concrete human being that does not want to give up his project of living ethical-religiously in the given historical actuality. With Christianity the inclosing reserve is broken from the outside by the god, who has paradoxically become present in time. In consequence, the individual receives the hope that he may become a new person. It is of course true that the life and the death of the god in the hands of men makes the human predicament worse than ever, since it reveals that all human beings are in sin. But this just intensifies the need for divine help and guarantees that the only hope the individual has is in his moving forward towards the good and away from sin with the help of the god.

Faith is, of course, especially functional for the sinner. Discussing \textit{The Concept of Anxiety} above, we noted that it is nearly impossible for someone who is a sinner and conscious of it to accept the good offered to him: how could a sinner believe in the goodness of anyone who wants to bring him help? On the other hand, the consciousness of sin not only makes the person suspicious, but also drives him towards redemption. The eternal understood abstractly, the eternal recollected, cannot really help someone who suffers from guilt and is anxious and desperate about it. When the individual, then, in the light of Christ learns the whole extent of his sin, he will definitely have no other hope than faith in Christ and in this situation it would, indeed, be rather irrational for him to decline the help offered. While despair drives the individual towards faith, \textsuperscript{1064} the consciousness of sin should drive him to the absolute relation to the god that appears in historical actuality.

\textsuperscript{1064} Kierkegaard already notes this in his journals in 1844, soon after having written \textit{The Concept of Anxiety}, see JP 2, 1113 / Pap. V A 40.
How does all this take place—how does one become a sinner, how does one become conscious of sin, how does one receive faith; which comes first; to what extent is the subject active, to what extent passive—all this appears as hopelessly complicated for the detached understanding. But for the person, who in his personal relation to the god that came to suffer for his sake comes to regard himself as a sinner, Christianity offers a simple way out. To him the “method,” the way to the truth, might not appear as intellectually complicated at all. Although there are several steps and the whole background of the ethical-religious life is involved in approaching the truth, there are no complicated thought operations involved.

First, the individual has to have ordinary belief in order to apprehend the historical event of the life of the alleged god. Doubt belongs to the correct apprehension of this historical event just as it belongs to the apprehension of any historical fact. In order to apprehend this life, the individual must first of all make its actuality into a doubtful possibility.

Second, the individual must get personally involved in the story and encounter the god who addresses him in it. Doubt and uncertainty pertain to this phase, too, and in addition there will be anxiety, terror, and the possibility of offense. The individual is here in two minds about whether to consider the alleged god as a pitiable human being or as the god. It is rather obvious that there is no scientific method to solve this “either/or,” no scientific method to decide how one faces the god in this situation. If one starts to reflect theoretically, one has already broken one’s relationship to the living god.

Third, the individual receives the passion of faith and achieves the right state of mind. In the light of the passion that the god gives to him, the individual is able to “see” and becomes convinced that this man is the god, who has come to save him. How the giving and receiving actually take place, Climacus leaves open. Is
there some kind of telepathy between the god and his disciple, or does the former affect the latter through some pneumatic matter that serves as a medium between them? Does the reception take place while the god still lives on the earth, or does it take place after his death, for example on Pentecost as the Gospel suggests? Is it the spirit of the god that is present in the congregation and in its practices, or the spirit that communicates through Scripture that recounts and clarifies the life of the god and plays the key role in the communication of the content of faith to the subsequent individual? All these issues Climacus leaves untouched in *Philosophical Fragments* as if they were of no essential significance. He just states that when the encounter with the god is happy, the understanding surrenders itself and the paradox (the god) gives itself, and the encounter takes place in the passion of faith. How does the paradox “give itself”? In the whole life of the god and in his death, or (also) through the spirit that the god somehow transfers to his chosen disciples either before or after his death? Climacus does not give any answers and does not even raise the issues. It appears that these details are insignificant for him. What his descriptions suggest is that the human individual becomes involved in the divine drama and in this drama he somehow receives faith and changes into a new person—or becomes offended and renounces the drama as foolishness.

Fourth, the individual becomes the disciple and the follower of the god. What will be implied in this, in being a Christian, is left open by Climacus. In *The Concept of Anxiety* Vigilius suggests that now the individual attains the earnest inwardness and the certainty that anticipate infinity, through which he is able constantly to overcome his anxiety. However, anxiety is not totally negated or overcome. Rather, the individual keeps living with it, keeps its wound open. But at the same time anxiety becomes a platform

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1065 *PF*, 54 and 59 / *SVI*, IV, 220–221 and 224.
from which the individual constantly moves in faith towards the reconciliation.

This appears to be the Christian “method” to attain the truth. Needless to say, it is not intersubjectively controlled, since it consists of the inner movements that the single individual makes in the situation where he finds himself. The justification for preferring this method over the trustworthy and controlled scientific one is, however, that the concrete, situated, but open-ended existence of the individual is more primary for the individual than all the critical, intersubjective, scientific reflection that tries to reach the reality behind it.

What is more problematic is that the “method” contains both intellectual and ethical contradictions. Climacus and Vigilius make no attempt to hide these, but acknowledge them. However, instead of solving them with reason and will, they seem to suggest that the contradictions should be taken as existential and historical tasks. Vigilius writes that a contradiction signifies a task, the fulfillment of which is a historical movement.¹⁰⁶⁶ What could this mean with respect to the contradictions involved in faith? It does not mean that the Christian should give himself to Hegelian speculation that purports to solve all contradictions. On the contrary, if the individual has reached salvation and certainty of his eternal happiness by renouncing his understanding, he should in all humbleness admit this and not pretend that faith is a form of knowledge.¹⁰⁶⁷ Instead, what Kierkegaard has in his mind seems to

¹⁰⁶⁶ CA, 28–29 / SI IV, 301. (Translation slightly altered.)
¹⁰⁶⁷ Sometimes it is suggested, and with some basis in Kierkegaard’s own statements, that the Christian truth is burdened by paradoxes and contradictions only for pagans such as Climacus and that for the believer the contradictions disappear (see, for example, McKinnon 1985, 192, and Vainio 2004, 88–90). This does not appear to be Kierkegaard’s view. He keeps on insisting upon the incomprehensibility of the content of faith (see, for example, JP 2, 1129 and 1148 / Pap. X 1 A 367 and X 4 A 635).
be a passionate movement that makes up for the crimes the Christian commits against universal reason and ethics. Just as “nobility obli
ges,” so being a Christian, a favorite of the god, obliges. If the Christian comes to relate to the universally human through the grace of the god as an “exception,” then he has the humble task to serve the rest of humanity, to do his best to share this divine gift, and in this way to become reconciled again with the universally human. (This task will be analyzed more thoroughly in subdivisions 5.3 and 7.2 below.)

Thus, the passionate ethical-religious striving comes to compensate the transgressions against reason and understanding that receiving faith implies. Of course, this compensation does not make faith and the ethical life based on faith any more rational in the eyes of reason and understanding. But if the intellectual faculties will not be satisfied with it, then faith may in its turn present its trumps. Whereas critical scientific research, skeptical reflection, and the consequent reasoning fail to respond to the problems that an attempt to live an ethical-religious life in the concrete world creates, faith, despite all the paradoxes implied in it, offers a way to tackle these with a new hope and with a potentiated determination.

The background of the concrete life in historical actuality also explains why the modern historical-critical approach to the sacred texts and to the practices of the Christian community cannot satisfy the ethical-religious individual: the approach does not give any answers to the ethical-religious problems that he is facing in the historical actuality. If the temporal and finite human individual relates himself ethically and religiously to the eternal and infinite, then he cannot find satisfaction in the approach that from the beginning naturalizes the phenomena of history and detaches them from the eternal and infinite. The modern historical-critical approach does not provide any eternal or infinite perspective into temporal existence, but systematically reduces the supposed in-
stances of the eternal and infinite into ordinary events in the im-
manent order of the world. On the other hand, Scripture and the
Christian practices give a sense and purpose for the temporal exis-
tence of the religious individual and hold the promise that the
impasse at which he has arrived in his ethical-religious striving may
be broken. Hence, it is quite understandable that the individual is
not willing to give up this promise for the nothing offered by the
modern approach.

But this also implies that the prerequisite for receiving faith
and holding onto it is that the individual has passed through the
previous stages of existence. For faith to be on a solid basis, the
individual must have gone through the subjective life-
development that leads from the immediate and commonsense
aesthetic existence, through irony and ethics, into religious exis-
tence characterized by an incurable sense of guilt. Only the subject
who has passed through such a development finds himself totally
in need of redemption. The need to explicate the subjective life-
development required by faith explains why Kierkegaard, having
in Philosophical Fragments and The Concept of Anxiety already
depicted the dramatic historical events that the Christian dogmas
are based on, again becomes immersed in the development of the
subject and begins to develop his theory of stages. In Stages on
Life's Way and in Postscript he again approaches the Christian
faith, but this time with his focus on subjective inwardness.1068
However, while the focus in these books is on subjective inward-
ness, the descriptions of the situatedness of the subject that we
find in the works that precede these works should be kept in
mind. This helps to understand the existential stages and the
movements from one stage to the other even in these works. In

1068 Climacus himself writes in Postscript that an assistant professor (such as I
would like to become) might say of the author of Stages on Life's Way: "He
represents inwardness." (CUP, 299 / SVI VII, 257.) In order not to let Cli-
macus down, I will say also of Climacus himself: "He represents inwardness."
chapters 2 and 4 it was argued that the aesthetic and ethical-religious stages of *Postscript* should be understood in the light of *The Concept of Irony* and by *Either/Or*. In chapter 6 the task is to show that the description of the Christian stage of existence in *Postscript* receives clarifying light from *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments*.

5.3 Inevitable, Blessed Suffering

But before we start to investigate the Christian mode of existence as described in *Postscript*, let us consider how falling in sin and falling in faith situate and compose the human individual anew. These events resemble the events delineated by Judge William in *Either/Or*: falling in love and assuming the ethical-religious intention as a response to it. In all of these events the individual first finds himself situated in a tension-filled situation, in which he has to make up his mind, or rather, his spirit. Then, in this situation he situates himself. In all of these events passivity is combined with activity with the result that the individual and his world are composed anew. For example, the individual falls in sin and the act of giving himself up to sin posits sinfulness in the world and determines the past and future for him. Or, he comes to encounter Christ and, whether he becomes offended or receives faith, something decisive happens to him and to his world.

Above we have already discussed at length both the situation that precedes the fall and the various situations that follow it. Likewise, we have examined how the teaching-learning situation is constituted that makes faith possible and how it comes into being. We have also observed how the individual reacts to this situation either in faith or in offense. Let us now consider the consequences that follow from the reception of faith for human situatedness. In *The Concept of Anxiety* and in *Philosophical Fragments* the focus is on how the individual becomes a Christian. There is not much in
them about the situatedness and practice that follows afterwards. But something there is, and I will argue that the bases for the Christian life that is described in the later Christian texts is already laid down by Vigilius and Climacus.

Both Vigilius and Climacus emphasize the moment of time as a *decisive turning point* in the history of the individual. Climacus writes that if “the moment is to have decisive significance...then the break has occurred, and the person can no longer come back.”

“The fullness of time” (Gal 4:4), the appearance of the god in time, has such decisive significance for the believer. The believer takes in earnest the paradoxical news of Christianity that eternity now begins in time and that “the decision of eternity (*Evighedens Afgjørelse*)” comes to take place in the moment of time.

In his individual history the moment in which he receives faith and binds himself to this decision comes to mean the moment of conversion, in which “his course took the opposite direction, or he was turned around,” and the moment of rebirth, “by which he enters the world the second time just as at birth.” Since the individual now puts his hope in the help that the god has come to offer, he cannot anymore imagine that he could reach eternity on his own, backwards, through recollection, writes Climacus.

It seems that Climacus actually refers with “the moment” to three analytically separable moments that in the situatedness of the individual come into one: 1) the moment in world history (the life

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1069 *PF*, 19 / *SV1* IV, 189.  
1070 *PF*, 58 / *SV1* IV, 223–224. It seems that the phrase “Evighedens Afgjørelse” carries more than one meaning: it seems to mean, first of all, that the moment manifests a decision made by God in eternity (cf. *PF*, 24–25 / *SV1* IV, 193–194), and second, that the moment decides the eternal happiness of the individual (cf. *PF*, 17–18 / *SV1* IV, 187–188). Third, it may also mean that in this moment the eternal god brings to the end the old disagreements between him and human beings and establishes a new covenant with them (*at afgjøre*, to settle, to bring to the end, for example, a dispute).  
1071 *PF*, 18–19 / *SV1* IV, 188–189.
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of the god on the earth), 2) the decisive moment in which the encounter of the individual and the god takes place (the moment of contemporaneity), and 3) the moment in the individual history (the moment of receiving faith, the moment of conversion and rebirth). This moment in its totality he understands as a work of the god and as a wonder.

What Vigilius writes on the moments of transition accords with this view of Climacus and complements it. According to Vigilius, in the moment of transition the eternal touches time as the eternal spirit posits itself (or is posited) in the individual life. Such an event constitutes temporality, in other words, it assigns meaning to the division of time into the present, the past, and the future. But in the light of The Concept of Anxiety it appears that there are not only one, but several decisive moments of transition in the life of the individual. First, at the moment of the fall, sin is posited and temporality emerges as sinfulness. After the moment of fall the individual will be anxious about the future and, in consequence, anxiety also comes to determine the present moment, the moment in which he lives. "Together this moment and the future posit in turn the past." In other words, the decisive moment of the fall stamps with sinfulness the whole temporal horizon of the individual. But, second, there is also the moment of

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1072 In addition to these three meanings, Climacus refers by the term to the god in time himself, when he writes "whether or not [the disciple] is to go further [and besides recollecting his untruth will also receive the truth and the condition for understanding it], the moment will decide (PF, 18–19 / SV1 IV, 188–189)." (Cf. Roberts 1986, 17 n.2.)
1075 CA, 88–91 / SV1 IV, 358–361.
1076 CA, 89 / SV1 IV, 359.
1077 Vigilius writes that "anxiety is the moment" in the individual life. (CA, 81 / SV1 IV, 350.)
1078 CA, 89 / SV1 IV, 359.
The appearance of Christ and the moment of faith. Here the moment becomes the eternal, and the true eternal that is also the future and the past becomes fully present in time.\textsuperscript{1079} In other words, the eternal that was waited for, the eternal that was in the beginning and that will be in the end (apparently Christ as the Word, through which everything was created, and as the Judge, who will return at the end of history), appears here in an atom of time as undivided, \textit{en atomo}.\textsuperscript{1080} However, as noticed above in subdivision 5.1.1, Christ as the eternal in time does not simply reconcile time with the eternal, but also shows the opposition between them. According to Vigilius, in Christianity “eternity and the moment become the extreme opposites.”\textsuperscript{1081} Vigilius writes that the moment posits the temporality in which eternity constantly permeates time, but time constantly cuts off (\textit{afskærer}) eternity.\textsuperscript{1082} With “cutting off” Vigilius cannot just refer to the state of affairs that time as a sequence of separate moments as a matter of fact constantly breaks the unity of the eternal into pieces. If it is the appearance of Christ that posits the moment and eternity as opposites, then the opposition must be between human beings, who in their sinfulness act in terms of time, and Christ, who acts in terms of eternity, and the “cutting off” must refer to our denial and liquidation of Christ. Third, Vigilius also refers in passing to the eschatological moment that the apostle Paul anticipates in 1 Cor 15:52: the world will pass away in the moment, \textit{en atomo kai en rhipe ophalmou}.\textsuperscript{1083} The task of faith is to overcome in the present moment both the opposition between eternity and time, and the anxiety that the future punishment arouses in the soul of the sin-

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1079] CA, 90 / SVI IV, 360.
\item[1081] CA, 84 n / SVI IV, 354 n.
\item[1082] CA, 89 / SVI IV, 359.
\item[1083] CA, 88 / SVI IV, 360.
\end{footnotes}
ful individual. Vigilius writes that faith extricates itself from “the anxiety’s moment of death” and in faith the synthesis “is eternal and at every moment possible.”

Thus, while the eschatological dimension of the future is there, in *The Concept of Anxiety* the emphasis falls on the present moment, on the constant overcoming of anxiety in faith. Similarly in *Philosophical Fragments* the emphasis falls on becoming contemporary with the god—however, not with the victorious, resurrected god, who will return, but with the descended god in the state of his abasement, i.e. with the god who lived here on earth as a humble and suffering servant. To this god Climacus returns as he would still be present among us. The personal relation to the godman, who is thought of as a contemporary, becomes for him the touchstone of faith, in which everything centers to the extent that there is actually nothing in his book on the resurrected Christ and on his expected victorious return in the end of time.

In emphasizing the task of overcoming anxiety in the present moment and the task of contemporaneity, Vigilius and Climacus anticipate the emphases of Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness unto Death* and in *Practice in Christianity*. There are also other traits in the accounts of Vigilius and Climacus that anticipate the ideas of Anti-Climacus. Among them is the idea that actually there are not just one or two decisive moments, but every moment is decisive. The human being leaps all the time, either in sin (in anxiety and despair) or in faith, and thus the leap of faith, through which one becomes contemporaneous with Christ and reaches certainty of one’s salvation, must be constantly repeated. Vigilius writes: “[The history of the individual life proceeds in a movement from state to state. Every state is posited by a leap. As sin entered into the world, so it continues to enter into the world if it is not halted. Nevertheless, every such repetition is not a simple consequence but a new

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This statement accords with the claim of Climacus that after the individual has received faith and the truth from the god, he can never forget the god without sinking into unfreedom again.\textsuperscript{1086} It also explains why the individual, who in the moment of faith gave up his understanding, must be constantly on guard lest the understanding, which was taken captive by the passion faith, should emancipate itself again and become offended at Christ.\textsuperscript{1087} According to Climacus, “faith is always in conflict, but as long as there is conflict, there is the possibility of defeat.”\textsuperscript{1088}

In consequence temporality and the life in the sensuous, historical world come to mean a test, a kind of purgatory, through which the believer must pass with the help of the god. Even if Vigilius maintains that temporality and sensuousness are sinfulness after sin is posited, he also claims that “as soon as sin is posited, it is no help to wish to abstract from the temporal any more than from the sensuous.”\textsuperscript{1089} The individual must put up with anxiety, which goes together with temporality and with sensuousness.\textsuperscript{1090} But at the same time the individual may have faith in the reconciliation promised to him in Christ, and through faith anxiety now becomes “absolutely educative” for him.\textsuperscript{1091} Similarly, the individual must put up with the sinfulness of race, i.e. with the endless derivation and procreation in sinfulness and with the falling away from God that sin brought into the world.\textsuperscript{1092} But if the

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\textsuperscript{1085} CA, 113 / SV IV, 380. Cf. this with PF, 37 / SV IV, 204–205, where Climacus compares human thinking to a continuous falling that characterizes walking.\textsuperscript{1086} PF, 17 / SV IV, 187.\textsuperscript{1087} PF, 48 / SV IV, 215.\textsuperscript{1088} PF, 108 / SV IV, 270.\textsuperscript{1089} CA, 92–93 / SV IV, 362–363.\textsuperscript{1090} CA, 64, 72–73, and 91 / SV IV, 334, 340–342, and 361.\textsuperscript{1091} CA, 155–162 / SV IV, 421–428.\textsuperscript{1092} CA, 52, 63–64, and 72 / SV IV, 323, 333–334, and 341.
\end{footnotesize}
individual has faith in Christ, then by suffering these inevitable consequences of sin he may actually grow closer to God.

The idea that suffering the consequences of sin here in the world is inevitable but educative is fully developed only in “The Gospel of Sufferings” (1847)\textsuperscript{1093} and in \textit{Practice in Christianity}. However, Kierkegaard already had the idea quite early. He formulates it in his journals already in 1837:

My conception of the relation between \textit{satisfactio vicaria} and man’s own expiation for his sins is as follows. It is certainly true, on the one hand, that sins are forgiven through the death of Christ, but on the other hand a person is not snatched as if by magic out of his old condition, the “body of sin” which Paul talks about (Romans 7:25). He has to go back the same way he came, while the consciousness that his sins are forgiven buoyed him up, gives him courage, and prevents despair—like someone who in the full consciousness of his sin denounces himself and then with confident courage goes to meet even a criminal’s death because he feels that it must be, but the consciousness that the case will now go before another and more lenient judge sustains him. He walks the dangerous way (which indeed can be thorny enough even with the consciousness of the forgiveness of sin, for one so often forgets it) and will not tempt God or claim miracles.\textsuperscript{1094}

In the margin of this entry we find the idea that we met also in \textit{Either/Or}: “One must go back the same way he came, just as the magic spell is broken by the musical passage...only when it is correctly played through backwards.”\textsuperscript{1095} In other words, one has to suffer the punishment through in order to be expiated from sin, but now one rejoices of this possibility as one sees what lies on the

\textsuperscript{1093} Part Three of \textit{Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits} (\textit{Opbyggelige Talr i forskjellig Aand}, 1847).
\textsuperscript{1094} JP 4, 3994 / Pap. II A 63.
other side of it: an eternal happiness awaits. As Kierkegaard writes in his journals from 1850, for the Christian, who trusts in grace, sin is transformed into “a fatherly punishment intended to help him go forward.” As a human being the Christian remains nailed into the cross of sin just like all other human beings, but at the same time he believes that this righteous punishment, the inevitable consequence of sin that falls upon him in temporality, is for his good.

The view is similar in some respects to the view that Judge William developed in *Either/Or*. In order to come to terms with his past the individual must, according to the judge, repent the sins of the fathers. Moreover, the individual should regard history as a task. But there is also a difference between the view of Judge William and the Kierkegaardian Christian view. Whereas the optimistic ethicist believed in the victorious striving of the individual, here hope is invested in the activity of the god and in one’s suffering through one’s punishment. Moreover, on the level of immanent human history the Christian view is simply hopeless: fundamentally, the life in temporality does not get any better through the ethical will of human beings. In this conviction the (Kierkegaardian) Christian view differs from the ethical-religious view of the judge and agrees, instead, with the views that pertain to the existential spheres of Religiousness and humor. But while the Christian comes to regard in the light of Christ and the dogma of sin the historical world as a penitentiary, at the same time he has a strong belief that it is good to suffer in this penitentiary just as Christ and his first followers did. In this way, by following Christ in suffering, the individual is little by little brought up, i.e. brought closer to the god. Thus, the individual does not consider his suffering just as a consequence of the temporal world and its

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1096 *JP* 4, 4032 / *Pap.* X 2 A 456.
contradiction with the eternal, but regards it as a part of the plan of providence that works for his salvation. And in this the Christian view differs essentially from Religiousness A and humor.

But what in The Concept of Anxiety and Philosophical Fragments would anticipate this view that there is no progress in human history and that the Christian will suffer quite concretely, if he wants to follow Christ in the given world? In the following I will argue that, if we put together the sinfulness of the human race described by Vigilius and the faith in the god described by Climacus, and consider what happens when the person with faith tries to get integrated into the existing world and society, we see that suffering will inevitably follow.\footnote{In other words, I would argue that Kierkegaard had assumed the view that the Christian will inevitably suffer persecution in this world before he became persecuted by the magazine Corsaren and the rabble of Copenhagen, and definitely forsaken and turned down by the elite from 1846 onwards. (On the persecution and desolation of Kierkegaard, see, for example, JP 5, 5998, 6039, and 6105 / Pap. VIII 1 A 99, 233, and 544; JP 6, 6382 / Pap. X 1 A 247; and VIII 1 A 533.) In fact, it seems to me that the view has its roots already in Kierkegaard’s Christian upbringing and that it is already implied in the journal entry from 1837 quoted above.}

Thus, I would also argue that Kierkegaard had already assumed this view before he became persecuted by the magazine Corsaren and the rabble of Copenhagen, and definitely forsaken and turned down by the elite from 1846 onwards.\footnote{On the persecution and forsakenness of Kierkegaard, see, for example, JP 5, 5998, 6039, and 6105 / Pap. VIII 1 A 99, 233, and 544; JP 6, 6382 / Pap. X 1 A 247; and VIII 1 A 533.} It seems to me that the view is already implied in the journal entry from 1837 quoted above, and that it has its roots in Kierkegaard’s Christian upbringing. This upbringing apparently included constant recollection of the wickedness and evil that Christ had to suffer. In 1849 Kierkegaard writes in his journals: “[A]lready as a small child I was told—and as solemnly as possible—that ‘the crowd’ spit upon
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Christ, who was in fact the truth. This I have hid deep in my heart.1101 Even if the entry from which this passage taken is entitled "A Poetic View of Myself," there seems no reason to doubt that the testimony is earnest and that Kierkegaard was brought up into a Christian awareness of the wickedness of the world as a child. Furthermore, in his childhood and school years Søren “the Fork” has apparently also had personal experience of evil.1102 But let us now return to the texts of Vigilius and Climacus, and seek in them bases for the inevitability of Christian suffering.

Climacus claims that when the individual receives faith, this means that he becomes singled out and at least temporarily isolated and cut off from his roots. According to Climacus, when the individual enters the world the second time in the rebirth, he enters it as

an individual human being who as yet knows nothing about the world into which he is born, whether it is inhabited, whether there are other human beings in it, for presumably we can be baptized en masse but can never be reborn en masse. Just as the person by Socratic midwifery gave birth to himself and in so doing forgot everything else in the world and in a more profound sense owed no human being anything, so also the one who is born again owes no human being anything, but owes that divine teacher everything.1103

1101 JP 6, 6389 / Pap. X I A 272. (Translation slightly altered.) Probably Kierkegaard is referring both to the teaching at the Moravian congregation and to his upbringing at home by his father. See Tudvad 2004, 404–407 and PV, 79–81 / SV1 XIII, 564–566. Cf. also the passage PC, 174–176 / SV1 XII, 162–165, which might have autobiographical background.

1102 See Kirmmse 1996, 19–34. Apparently, Kierkegaard was treated rather hard-handedly by his classmates in the School of Civic Virtue (Borgerdydskolen). It is, of course, hard to judge who was to blame, “the Fork” or his classmates that gave him what he was begging for.

1103 PF, 19 / SV1 IV, 188–189. Here Climacus anticipates what Kierkegaard states more emphatically later, for example, in his journals from 1854 in the
Studying Either/Or we saw how the individual became isolated as he received himself from the eternal power in the moment of ethical choice. Here we see that the individual also becomes isolated in the moment of his rebirth. Moreover, even after the moment of isolation his relation to other individuals remains a Socratic relation. In other words, his relations to other individuals will continually be established through his relation to the eternal just as in the Socratic paradigm. However, now this relation does not go via the eternal that resides in every individual but, paradoxically, via the eternal that has appeared in time and that touches them in time. From the primacy of this personal relation to Christ it follows that the Christian Church becomes a congregation of single individuals and, thus, loses its significance as the stronghold of Christians. Indeed, while Climacus writes in Philosophical Fragments a lot about the task of being contemporary with the god, he writes next to nothing about congregation, and the little that he writes is critical towards a whole-hearted reliance on such a community. He criticizes the notion of the jubilant and triumphant Church and pits against it the faith that remains always in conflict. The skepticism of Climacus with regard to the triumphant Church is due to consciousness of sin. The individual, who believes that Christ was the god, becomes conscious of his own sin, but also of the sinfulness of the human race and the world. In the sinful world and as participants of the sinful race, Christians will have little time for jubilant celebrations.

On the other hand, Christians cannot and should not escape their situatedness in the world and in society, either. As noticed above, Vigilius maintains that the human being is individuum and

entry entitled “An Alarming Note.” (See JP 2, 2056–2057 / Pap. XI 1 A 189–190.)

See EO2, 177 / SV1 II, 160.


as such “simultaneously himself and the whole race” and that this is also “man’s perfection viewed as a state.” He also maintains that “every human life is religiously designed” and that the individual should express his religious existence also in his outward existence. Moreover, because the god also showed that he loves the world and cares for the human individuals, it follows by itself that the individual should not remain in isolation, but he should at least try to communicate the love and the good news to other individuals. If the passion of love was the motive of the god to become incarnated, it appears that the Christian is bound to get carried away by this same passion. He must assume the love that the god had towards human beings as a leading principle in his own relations to them. If he does not react in this way, he breaks not only against love but also against the common sense of justice. Cli- macus asks, “would [the god] bring about a reconciliation with some human beings such that their reconciliation with him would make their difference from all others blatantly flagrant [himmel-raabende]?” The answer seems to be negative.

But the problem is that this injustice that “cries out to heaven” appears to be an integral part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, in

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1107 CA, 28 / SV1 IV, 300–301.
1108 CA, 105 / SV1 IV, 374. This seems to imply that the individual is all the time related to other individuals and what he does is at least potentially meaningful for them. Through the passion of faith there should then be a new connection established between the “monads,” just as there was a connection between them through ethical striving. Fear and Trembling might appear for some to deny this. But as I read Fear and Trembling, the point of the book is not that there is no connection between God and Abraham or between us and Abraham, but that both connections are established through the paradoxical faith. If this were not the case then there would indeed be no sacred bond either between God and Abraham, between Isaac and Abraham, or between us and Abraham, and Abraham would be lost. (Cf. FT, 15 and 55 / SV1 III, 68 and 105.)
1109 PF, 106–107 / SV1 IV, 268.
which the god establishes alliances with particular human individuals and peoples in space and time. As the pseudonyms of Kierkegaard are eager to point out, God has his favorites. In *Fear and Trembling* Johannes de silentio brings out as an outsider the case of Abraham, the case of God’s chosen one, who through his personal god-relationship is set as a single individual higher than the universal.\footnote{FT, 54–55 / SV1, III, 104–105.} In *Repetition* Constantin Constantius points out that there are “exceptions” and delineates what it is to be a religious exception and what the relationship of such an exception to the universal is.\footnote{See his explanation of theme of his book in R, 226–230 / SV1, III, 260–264.} In *Postscript* Climacus brings out the tensions that arise when the individual relates to God through something historical. Here Climacus points out the specific form the problem of the exceptions and favorites takes in Christianity. God comes into existence as a particular human being and reveals the truth to some particular individuals, while others remain ignorant and cannot see the true nature of God. At the same time the existence of sin is also revealed to the individuals and this makes them exceptions from the universal. The individuals see now that the whole human race lies in sin, but that a major part of its members is not aware of it. These include at least the pagans who have lived and who live outside Christendom.\footnote{CUP, 581–584 / SV1, VII, 507–509; cf. also CUP, 259–267 / SV1, VII, 218–227.} But taken the claims of Climacus that no one begins as a Christian and that most people live guided by their finite understanding and social surroundings only, it seems probable that there are a lot of pagans also within Christendom.\footnote{See CUP, 85 and 591 / SV1, VII, 66 and 514.} This is at least the view of Vigilius. His description of spiritlessness, his characterization of it as a repetition of paganism within Christendom, and his claim that the demonic
resistance against redemption and truth “probably has never been as widespread as in our times” make that clear.\footnote{See CA, 93–96 and 136 / SV1 IV, 363–366 and 402.}

Thus, there is a problem: a \textit{contradiction between the isolation of the sinful believer and the realization of the universal} that ethics and Christian neighborly love rightly demand from every individual. Vigilius understands such contradictions as tasks that lead the individual into action. As we noted above, he writes that “a contradiction is always the expression of a task, and a task is movement, but a movement that as a task is the same as that to which the task is directed is an historical movement.”\footnote{“[E]n Opgave er Bevægelse; men en Bevægelse hen til det Samme som Opgave, der var som det Samme opgivet, er en historisk Bevægelse.” (CA, 28–29 / SV1 IV, 301.)} Similarly, the idea in \textit{Fear and Trembling} seems to be that the teleological suspension of the ethical involved in becoming an exception must be, first, teleological and, second, only a temporary suspension. In other words, in the end the exception returns under the ethical and works within it for the universal good. The same idea also turns up at the end of \textit{Repetition}, where Constantius maintains that while the exception battles with the universal, he also works for the universal.\footnote{See R, 227 / SV1 III, 261.}

But how may the task be fulfilled? In searching for answers to this question it is worth noticing that, even if it purports to be just a formal thought-project posited as an antithesis for the Socratic formation, the story that Climacus tells of the god in \textit{Philosophical Fragments} has certain content also. It is told that the god, who is the truth, loves the human individual that is in untruth and polemical towards the truth, which in the light of \textit{The Concept of Anxiety} means also that the individual is in evil and polemical towards the good. In order to overcome this difference, the difference of sin, and in order to be “absolutely the equal of the lowliest
of human beings,” the god must assume the form of a humble servant and suffer all conceivable hardships. Climacus writes that he must “suffer all things, endure all things, be tried in all things, hunger in the desert, thirst in his agonies, [and] be forsaken in death.” But that the god, who is without guilt and sin, willingly suffers all this breaks against human morality and the ethical order of things. Thus, the divine love implies a break with the established principle of moral behavior (a break against moral symmetry, “an eye for eye”) and establishes equality and unity through suffering. At the same time it means an unexpected and scandalous inversion of the established hierarchies.

Now, this story about the god could also be taken to define the task of the follower of the god. In that case, the follower of the god could compensate for being a favorite of the god by doing works of love for his neighbors and by suffering the same as his master had to suffer. However, such a task is bound to seem strange from the point of view of human understanding. It becomes even stranger, if one holds that human individuals are sinners and as such bound to the evil. If one considers the human sinfulness in earnest, should one not agree with Luther that both the spiritual and the secular rule (regiment) and the hierarchies corresponding to them are needed? What else except for strict law and order sanctified by the rule of the sword could bring the sinful individuals back to their senses? And, of course, spiritual leaders and authorities are also needed, since the sinful souls that easily go astray surely need shepherds that guide them with their staffs? However, Climacus nowhere acknowledges this, but claims instead that the disciples of the god may serve only as occasions for other human beings to receive faith from the god. Thus, he leaves the disciples of the god without the protection of worldly power and without the

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1117 PF, 32–33 / SVI IV, 200.
protection of such spiritual power that would make them superior to other people.

To make the position of disciples of the god even more vulnerable and helpless, Climacus points out indirectly the difference between the god and the human ideal of universal man outlined and championed by Judge William. According to the latter ideal, the individual should realize the universal, that is, he should marry, have friends and a job. Climacus seemingly supports this ideal, for he writes: "It may be very beautiful to want to live as the birds of the air live, but it is not permissible, and one can indeed end up in the saddest of plights, either dying in hunger—if one has the endurance for that—or living on the goods of others." On the other hand, however, he tells us how the god "went his way unconcerned about administering and distributing the goods of this world...as unconcerned about his living as the birds of the air." This was because he was seeking only "the follower’s love." For the same reason he had no wife, no friends, and no relatives. To him the disciple was brother and sister and being concerned about the disciple was for him the only relaxation from his work. Such supererogatory excessiveness could hardly be considered as an expression of the universally human, could it? Climacus himself points out the difference between these two ideals. He raises the question of whether the example of Christ expresses the essentially human and whether a human being is allowed to follow the example of Christ:

All this seems very beautiful, but is it also proper? Does [the god] not thereby elevate himself above what is ordinarily the condition of human beings? Is it right for a human being to be as carefree as the bird and not even fly hither and thither for food as the bird does? Should he not even think of tomorrow? We are unable to poetize the

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1119 PF, 45 / SVI IV, 213.
1120 PF, 56–57 / SVI IV, 222–223.
god otherwise, but what does a fiction prove? Is it permissible to wander around erratically like this, stopping wherever evening finds one? The question is this: May a human being express the same thing?—for otherwise the god has not realized the essentially human.

The answer of Climacus is affirmative on the condition that human inwardness is truly on the level of the ideal:

Yes, if he is capable of it, he may also do it. If he can become so absorbed in the service of the spirit that it never occurs to him to provide for food and drink, if he is sure that the lack will not divert him, that the hardship will not disorder his body and make him regret that he did not first of all understand the lessons of childhood before wanting to understand more—yes, then he truly may do it, and his greatness is even more glorious than the quiet assurance of the lily.\textsuperscript{1121}

Here Climacus clearly warns us to follow directly the example set by the god. But at the same time he sets up as the ideal becoming “so absorbed in the service of the spirit” that one could follow the example of the god, even if the ideal implies becoming an exception from the universally human ethical-religious form of life.

To sum up: The encounter with the god signifies a decisive turning point in the life of the individual. It posits simultaneously both faith and sin, both reconciliation and judgment, and thereby creates contradictions that constitute the task of the individual. Since the god has chosen the individual as his disciple, he should consider himself as privileged, but because the god wants equality and reconciliation with all human individuals, he should consider his privilege as an obligation to serve others. On the other hand, the presence in time of the eternal god, who is love, burns away the established morality and hierarchies, and thereby leaves the single individual without the support and protection of the worldly and ecclesiastical order. The example of the god forbids having recourse to the law and order in serving the other individuals. The

\textsuperscript{1121} Ibid.
spirit of love that it manifests should inspire the individual to follow this example, so that he would joyfully face all the sufferings that following it implies. In this way, through joyful suffering, the individual should be able to overcome sin both in himself and in others. This is the Christian prospect of living poetically that now begins to open up. It puts the emphasis on the present moment, but at the same time it has the eternal before itself as the future and regards the life in temporality as a way towards it.

Let us finally consider what happens to the eternal bliss of erotic love, and to Judge William’s idea of marriage as its concrete historical realization in this Christian variant of living poetically. According to Vigilius, Christianity has suspended the erotic as indifferent, because the tendency of Christianity is to bring the spirit further and in spirit there is no difference between man and woman. Vigilius claims that spirit does not and cannot express itself in the erotic and it cannot participate in the culmination of the erotic. That is why there is always anxiety in the erotic. A perfect spirit would not be sexually qualified and, according to Vigilius, that explains why Christ, who was tempted in all human ordeals, was not tempted in this respect. However, Vigilius admits that when the sexual is posited “as the extreme point of the synthesis” in the human individual, “all abstraction is of no avail.” The individual cannot cut sexuality away from his being. But what he may do is to bring the sexuality “under the qualification of the spirit.” According to Vigilius, “the realization of this is the victory of love in a person in whom the spirit is so victorious that the sexual is forgotten, and recollected only in forgetfulness. When this has come about, sensuousness is transfigured in spirit and anxiety is driven out.”

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1122 CA, 70–71 / SV1 IV, 340–341.
1123 CA, 79–70 / SV1 IV, 348–349.
What is Vigilius actually saying here, what should we make out of it? What does it mean, not to abstract from sexuality, but to forget it and to recollect it only in forgetfulness? The words bring to mind what the apostle Paul, with the imminent end of the world before his eyes, wrote in 1 Cor 7. The apostle writes that it is better to marry than burn with passion, but “from now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.”

To interpret, one should all the time recollect that sexuality, just as every other worldly phenomenon, is passing away. One should also recollect that the spirit does not find its culmination in erotic love, but in the neighborly love established by the god, and that for this love there is no difference between man and woman. This point of view, perhaps, does not flatter the vanity and arouse the expectations of the bride and bridegroom, and it does not make the Christian marriage into a jubilee and pure fulfillment of romantic love. But this is how Christianity deals with the erotic.

We may also note that Vigilius regards procreation as a means of disseminating sinfulness and, apparently, considers the derivation of the human race as an example of the constant falling away from God that sin in positing sexuality brought into world. In this he renounces the romantic dimensions of parenthood and makes it appear as having children would be, at best, a weakness that God may forgive and turn into the good in his incomprehensible mercy. This way to regard marriage and procreation certainly diminishes, or at least qualifies with “negativity,” the joy that Judge William found in his children.

1124 1 Cor 7:29–31 (Translation is from the New International Version.)
1125 Cf. PF, 56–57 / SV1 IV, 222–223 referred to above.
1126 CA, 52, 63–64, and 72 / SV1 IV, 323, 333–334, and 341.
All in all we find that the Christian variant of living poetically lacks the immanent harmony and concentricity that characterized the ethical-religious variant of Judge William. In compensation it has its ecstatic orientation towards the eternal that helps to balance the negativity upon which the ethical-religious project was wrecked: the eternal now lies open outside the individual and his obedient relation to it helps the individual to encounter all conceivable and inconceivable negativity that he may encounter in his temporal existence. After the dramatic historical events of the fall and the encounter with the god described in *The Concept of Anxiety* and in *Philosophical Fragments*, the individual has an idea for which he can live and die no matter what happens; the way to joyful suffering lies open for him.
6 The Christian Sphere of Existence

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to “Philosophical Fragments”*, Climacus repeats one more time the movement from immediacy through ethical-religious striving to the gates of Christian existence. The movement was already realized in the preceding authorship, but now the focus is exclusively on the subject. However, what Climacus writes in his *Postscript* about the existence of the subject becomes fully understandable only in the historical and social context of existence. In chapters 2 and 4, the situatedness of the aesthetic and the ethical-religious existence was brought out. Let us now examine what role the historical and social situation plays in the Christian existence.

At the end of *Philosophical Fragments* Climacus wrote that he might publish a sequel, in which the issue of *Fragments* would receive its proper “historical costume.” The first part of *Postscript*, “The Objective Issue of the Truth of Christianity,” is this promised sequel and as such is a postscript to *Philosophical Fragments*. The second part is, according to Climacus, a new approach to the issue of *Fragments*. It approaches the issue from the point of view of the subject, and deals with “The Subjective Individual’s Relation to the Truth of Christianity.” In *Fragments* the issue of becoming a Christian was raised in general terms: “Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?” In *Postscript* Climacus gives a bit more subjective formu-

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1127 See *PF*, 109 / *SV1* IV, 270.
1128 *CUP*, 17 / *SV1* VII, 8.
lation for the issue: “I, Johannes Climacus, born and bred in this city and now thirty years old, an ordinary human being like most folk, assume that a highest good, called an eternal happiness, awaits me just as it awaits a housemaid and a professor. I have heard that Christianity is one’s prerequisite for this good. I now ask how I may enter into relation to this doctrine.”\textsuperscript{1130}

From the point of objective science such an unscientific, subjective approach to the truth of Christianity seems to be “matchless audacity.” However, Climacus claims that it is Christianity itself that compels the individual to assume the subjective approach. Christianity presupposes within the single individual an infinite interest in his own happiness, “an interest with which he hates father and mother and thus probably also makes light of systems and world-historical surveys.”\textsuperscript{1131} According to Climacus, Christianity attaches “an enormous importance to the individual subject” and “wants to be involved with him, him alone and in the same way with each one individually.”\textsuperscript{1132} Thus, the subjective approach is, in fact, the only adequate response to the demand that Christianity makes of all individuals alike.

In order to attain the truth of Christianity, the subject has to go through the life-development that Climacus outlines in his theory of stages and then make the passionate resolution of faith, “the qualitative transition of the leap from unbeliever to believer.”\textsuperscript{1133} In Postscript Climacus puts a strong emphasis on these subjective preconditions, because neither the need for personal ethical-religious development nor the need for a passionate leap that breaks against reason and understanding was acknowledged in 19\textsuperscript{th} century Christendom in general, and in learned theology in particular. Thus, it is both the nature of Christianity and the his-

\textsuperscript{1130} \textit{CUP}, 15–16 / \textit{SV1 VII}, 7.
\textsuperscript{1131} \textit{CUP}, 16 / \textit{SV1 VII}, 7.
\textsuperscript{1132} \textit{CUP}, 49 / \textit{SV1 VII}, 36.
\textsuperscript{1133} \textit{CUP}, 12 / \textit{SV1 VII}, 3.
torically given situation that make Climacus emphasize the significance of subjective existence and inwardness, and therefore his approach is not an expression of subjective arbitrariness, but a corrective that relates in a determinate way to the given historical situation.

Climacus gives a vivid, poetic description of the particular real-life situation that made him realize that his time needs to recollect, what it means to exist and what inwardness is. One evening in a graveyard Climacus happens to overhear an old man speaking to his grandson at the grave of his son, the father of the grandson. The deceased had become absorbed in speculation of the ultimate reality and, fascinated by its “sham eternity,” he had lost his Christian faith and died without it. Behind the bush Climacus hears how in fervent words the grandfather urges his grandson solemnly to promise that he will not let himself be deceived, like his father, by a phantom, but will hold fast to the faith in Jesus Christ “in life and in death” no matter how the shape of the world is changed.1134

Deeply impressed by this “heart-rending scene” of the unhappy old man speaking to a child that could not possibly understand the issues at stake, Climacus vows to solve this “complicated criminal case.” He starts to investigate “where the misunderstanding between speculative thought and Christianity lies.”1135 Through his private investigations he then comes to see the larger cultural-historical background that forms the deeper ground for the misunderstanding:

[It] finally became clear to me that the deviation of speculative thought and, based thereupon, its presumed right to reduce faith to a factor might not be something accidental, might be located far deeper in the orientation of the whole age—most likely in this, that

because of much knowledge people have entirely forgotten what it means to exist and what inwardness is.\textsuperscript{1136}

This view of the cultural-historical situation informs the strategy Climacus assumes in Postscript. While culture (Dannelse) makes it appear “so very easy to be a Christian,” Climacus wants to make it as difficult as it actually is. Against the optimistic tendency that worships Bildung or Dannelse, that is, cultivation of human spirit through arts, sciences, and civilized manners, Climacus claims that culture and knowledge actually make it more difficult to become a Christian.\textsuperscript{1137} “The point is the same that Climacus already made in Philosophical Fragments: the reliability of the eighteen centuries of Christian culture creates an illusion that we are Christians without further ado. In fact, “as understanding and culture and education increase, it becomes more and more difficult to sustain the passion of faith.”\textsuperscript{1138} Consequently, it has not become easier to become a Christian in the 19th century than in the first period, but more difficult: “The preponderance of the understanding in the cultured person, the orientation toward the objective, will continually create in this person an opposition to becoming a Christian, and the opposition is the sin of the understanding: half measures.”\textsuperscript{1139}

Into this sin, according to Climacus, theology has also fallen. In Philosophical Fragments Climacus described how, instead of receiving faith from the god, a person may start either to investigate empirically the life of the god or investigate philosophically his teaching.\textsuperscript{1140} In Postscript these alternatives for the subjective approach find their respective counterparts in the historical and

\textsuperscript{1136} CUP, 242 / SVI VII, 203.
\textsuperscript{1137} CUP, 383 / SVI VII, 332.
\textsuperscript{1138} CUP, 47 and 606 / SVI VII, 35 and 528. Cf. PF, 71 and 94–99 / SVI IV, 234 and 257–261.
\textsuperscript{1139} CUP, 606 / SVI VII, 528.
philosophical approaches that learned theologians assume to the truth of Christianity. Climacus writes:

Viewed as historical truth, the truth [of Christianity] must be established by a critical consideration of the various reports etc., in short, in the same way as historical truth is ordinarily established. In the case of philosophical truth, the inquiry turns on the relation of a doctrine [i.e. that of Christianity], historically given and verified, to the eternal truth [discovered immanently through human reason].”

According to Climacus, the problem with these **objective** approaches is that neither the scientific researcher nor the speculative thinker is “infinitely, personally, impassionedly interested,” which is the indispensable precondition for entering into relation to Christianity. Hence, from the accumulation of objective research personal salvation does not follow. On the contrary, generation after generation the objective scholars fall into perdition. Climacus describes this tragicomic procession of objective research:

One generation after the other has died; new difficulties have arisen, have been conquered, and new difficulties have arisen. As an inheritance from generation to generation, the illusion has persisted that the method is the correct one, but the learned research scholars have not yet succeeded etc. All seem to feel comfortable; they all become more and more objective. The subject’s personal, infinite, impassioned interestedness (which is the possibility of faith and then faith, the form of eternal happiness and then eternal happiness) fades away more and more because the decision is postponed...One has become too objective to have an eternal happiness, because this happiness inheres precisely in the infinite, personal, impassioned interestedness.

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1141 CUP, 21 / SV I, VII, 11.
1142 CUP, 21 / SV I, VII, 12.
1143 Climacus refers to the parable on five foolish maidens in CUP, 16 / SV I VII, 7–8: a scholar who gives up his subjective passion for eternal happiness is like those maidens that let their lamps run out of oil in Mt 25:1–12.
and it is precisely this that one relinquishes in order to become objective... 1144

The terror of sin and perdition implied in this humorous description becomes manifest if we remember that in *The Concept of Anxiety* all approaches to the eternal truth, where the truth does not become concrete in the earnest inwardness of the subject, were claimed to manifest the demonic anxiety about the good. 1145 Climacus seems to accept this diagnosis, since he states that, when it comes to the Christian truth, the orientation toward the objective manifests the sin of the understanding. 1146 No wonder then that, with the gigantic achievements of the traditions of objective research around him, poor Climacus feels his predicament to be like that of a poor lodger, who has an attic room at the top of a huge apartment house and who suddenly realizes that there is something wrong with its foundations. As he looks out from his attic window, he sees just “redoubled and rushed efforts to beautify and expand the building.” No one notices the fundamental flaw. 1147

In this situation Climacus finds an unexpected ally in the famous representative of Enlightenment reason, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), who in the hands of Climacus turns into an outstanding “subjective thinker.” As a subjective thinker, who was conscious of the fact that he exists and is situated in the changeable existence, 1148 Lessing (à la Climacus) emphasized points that are also central to the subjective approach to Christianity: he emphasized, first, the need of continual ethical striving towards truth and, second, that the transition of faith, in which the subject builds an eternal truth on historical reports, is a *leap*. 1149

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1144 CUP, 27 / SVI VII, 16.
1146 See CUP, 606 / SVI VII, 528 quoted above.
1147 CUP, 63 / SVI VII, 47.
1149 See CUP, 93 and 121–122 / SVI VII, 74 and 99–100.
for a subjective leap arises when a dualistic view, according to which temporal existence and eternal truth are separated from each other, is combined with a skeptical position that denies the possibility of a methodical scientific way of bridging the gap between the temporal and the eternal.\textsuperscript{150} As Lessing had pointed

\textsuperscript{150} The combination of philosophical dualism and skepticism runs through all of the Climacian texts from Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitantum est (the manuscript from 1843–44) to Postscript. When it comes to Johannes Climacus and Philosophical Fragments, see JC, 166–172 / Pap. IV B 1, pp. 144–150, and PF, 39–44 and 79–85 / SV I IV, 207–211 and 242–249. In Postscript the dualistic view is expressed beautifully in Platonic metaphors that capture the structure of human existence. Existence is, like Eros in Plato’s Symposium, “begotten by the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is therefore continually striving.” Or like in the Phaedrus, “eternity is infinitely quick like the winged steed [Pegasus], temporality is an old nag, and the existing person is the driver.” (CUP, 92 and 311–312 / SV I VII, 73 and 267.) The point is that the synthesis of the eternal and temporal demands continuous subjective striving and passion of faith, because according to the skeptical view of Climacus the individual is encompassed in a changeable, historical existence, and through the historical he is never able to reach objective certainty with regard to the eternal (CUP, 38 and 80–82 / SV I VII, 27 and 62–64). According to Climacus, Christianity must also have as its basis this skeptical position, if it wants to base salvation not on knowledge but on faith. Although at the bottom of doubt there is an abstract certainty, in practice doubt cannot overcome itself: “If it is the case that doubt overcomes itself, that by doubting everything one in this very doubt wins truth without a break and an absolutely new point of departure, then not one single Christian category can be maintained, then Christianity is abolished.” (CUP, 335–336 n / SV I VII, 290 n.) The combination of dualism and skepticism also appears in Postscript in the passage in which Climacus turns down Hegel’s attempt to overcome the dualistic and skeptical Kantian position. Like Hegel, Climacus sees the Kantian position as problematic. However, instead of overcoming it through “pure thinking,” he suggests that skepticism must be “broken off.” (See CUP, 328 / SV I VII, 282–283.) Thus, Climacus agrees with the dualistic and skeptical position when it comes to philosophical reflection. On the other hand, he agrees with Hegel that this position must be overcome. However, his view is that it cannot be overcome by pure thinking, but only by ethical striving and Christian faith.
out, “contingent truths of history can never become the demonstration of necessary truths of reason.”\footnote{CUP, 97 / SVI VII, 77.} Therefore, concludes Climacus, historical knowledge of the eternal is impossible and, if the Christian all the same wants to reach certainty regarding his eternal happiness through a relation to something historical, he must make the leap of faith.\footnote{CUP, 105–106 / SVI VII, 85.}

The way of thinking here is, according to Climacus himself, the same as in \textit{Fear and Trembling} and in \textit{Philosophical Fragments}.\footnote{CUP, 97 and 105–106 / SVI VII, 77 and 85.} What it runs counter with is the attempt to base faith in objective scientific research. For faith, nothing decisive can possibly result from the historical-critical research of Holy Scripture and the Church. On the other hand, Climacus does not claim that the historical phenomena of the Bible and the Church would have no significance whatsoever for the Christian believer. According to the view presented in \textit{Philosophical Fragments} the Bible and the Church may have significance at least as occasions for the individual to receive faith from the god.\footnote{PF, 104 / SVI IV, 266.} Certain passages in \textit{Postscript} suggest that for a believer they come to have significance beyond that.

Climacus admits first of all that “when the truth of Christianity is asked about historically, or what is and what is not Christian truth, \textit{Holy Scripture} immediately presents itself as a crucial document.”\footnote{CUP, 23 / SVI VII, 13. (Italics have been added.)} The problem is, however, that the characteristic of Scripture that is most crucial for the believer, namely, that it has been inspired by the spirit of God, can never be secured historically-critically.\footnote{CUP, 24–25 / SVI VII, 14.} Inspiration does not ensue as a result of critical
research, since it is “an object only of faith.” All the same, that Scripture is inspired is what the Christian faith assumes as it lets itself be informed by Scripture. Indirectly Climacus admits this, when he writes that Christ was and is “the paradox in whom no one could detect anything (literally understood)...not even the disciples before they had been made aware (John 1:36,42), what Isaiah had prophesied (53:2,3,4, especially verse 4).” Thus, it is the belief in the word of God as it stands in the inspired Scripture, in the prophesy of Isaiah, that makes up a precondition for the disciples to recognize Christ.

Hence, when Climacus criticizes scientific study of the Bible, he does not deny that the Christian faith regards these texts as holy. His point is that it is not the objective research that apodictically comes to show, but the subjective faith of the Christian that paradoxically believes that this historical document has come into being through inspiration. His second point is that ultimately the historical-critical research of the Bible is without essential significance, for, whatever the results of the research, the believer may always hold on to his belief that God has come to redeem us in Jesus Christ. Even if the enemies of Scripture were able to prove that “these books are not by these authors, are not authentic, are not integri [complete], are not inspired (this cannot be disproved, since it is an object of faith), it does not follow that these authors have not existed and, above all, that Christ has not existed. To that extent, the believer is still equally free to accept it...”

On the other hand, Climacus also objects to the tendentious reading of the Bible, which he calls “pusillanimous and timid biblical interpretation.” It is worth quoting Climacus extensively here:

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1157 CUP, 25 n / SVI VII, 14 n.
1159 CUP, 30 / SVI VII, 19.
If a childish orthodoxy has cast a comic light on Christianity, so also has the kind of biblical interpretation that in its timid obsequiousness, without being conscious of it, reverses the relation and is not so much concerned about understanding the Bible as about being understood by it, is not so much concerned about understanding the Bible passage as about having a Bible passage to quote...

Submission to the authority of the adviser becomes a cunning way to derive advantage from the authority. But is that consulting? Is this submitting to what is called the divine authority of the Bible? It is, after all, a cowardly attempt to push away all responsibility by never acting on one's own—just as if one had no responsibility for the manner in which one finds a Bible passage on one's side. Psychologically, it is very remarkable how clever, how ingenious, how subtle, how persevering in erudite research certain people can be, just to have a Bible passage to quote. They seem totally unaware, however, that this is simply making a fool of God, treating him like a poor fish who has been so foolish as to put something in writing and now has to put up with what the lawyers want to make of it...[I]t is not a close relation between God and a human being if they are so distant from each other that there is place and use for all this worried subtlety and pondering of a despondent submissiveness.¹¹⁶⁰

To interpret, Scripture should not be used, as it has been used by various Christian groups and Churches, to show that we are right. Instead, it should be used for finding out the ethical-religious truth that is “truth for you,” i.e. “the truth that builds up.”¹¹６¹ The study of Scripture should build up the relationship between spirit and spirit. In the light of Postscript, the right reader of the Bible is the individual who is striving ethically and religiously to reach a free and open relation with God. It is his aspiration for the highest that guarantees that he makes noble, and not petty-minded, use of

¹¹₆¹ Cf. EO2, 354 / SVI II, 318.
Holy Scripture. The ideal is a free and open-minded dialectical process.

In other words, Climacus emphasizes that the subject relates himself actively to the Bible. In his life the believer is directed by this historical document, but not mechanically. Through his faith he actively situates himself in front of God as he reads or listens to the Word, and he bears the responsibility for how he applies the Word in his life. Even if the Bible, the Holy Scripture, informs his life and determines his orientation in life, it does this through his own activity. We encounter here again the combination of activity and passivity familiar to us from the use of the Bible in *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments*.

The principles that Climacus sets for someone that studies the Bible for the sake of his eternal happiness are, first, that faith is required in the appropriation of its truth and, second, that appropriation should be characterized by personal ethical-religious striving. These principles also characterize the stance of Climacus towards *the Church and its sacraments*: these are holy if permeated by personal faith inasmuch as they bring the ethical-religious individual into a more inward spiritual relation to God. On these conditions the Christian has absolute respect for them. Climacus writes, for example, that he understands very well why Magister Kierkegaard as a layman called his *Upbuilding Discourses* “upbuilding discourses” and not “sermons”:

They are not ‘sermons’; that is, the sermon corresponds to the essentially Christian, and a pastor is essentially what he is by ordination, and ordination is a teacher’s paradoxical transformation in time, by which he in time becomes something other than what would be the immanent development of genius, talent, gifts, etc...On the other hand, ordination is a *caracter indelebilis* [indelible mark]. What does this mean except that here again time becomes decisive for the eter-
nal, whereby recollection's immanent withdrawal is prevented. The Christian nota bene is in turn written alongside ordination."

Here Climacus goes markedly further than even the most orthodox Lutherans of his times would have gone in defending the hegemony of the Church. In that he makes ordination into sacrament, which makes the individual in question a link in the Apostolic Succession and which stamps him with an indelible mark, he in effect falls away from Lutheranism back into Roman Catholicism. This exaggeration might be taken as irony towards bishop Mynster and others that defended the state church against the sectarian movements, but that seems unlikely. More probably Climacus is suggesting that a Lutheran is also bound to have such a pious attitude towards ordination: through his faith he sanctifies it and respects it as holy—as a free individual, who believes in Christ who established the sacraments and ordained the apostles and, thereby, established the apostolic Church. But, outside faith in Christ, ordination itself does not contain any magical qualities and it would be superstition to believe that it does.

This at least seems to be the position of Climacus with regard to baptism. Climacus writes: “Let it be ten times true that Baptism is divine passport for eternity, but if light-mindedness and worldliness want to use it as a permit, is it then still a passport?...Baptism

\[\text{\footnotesize 1162 CUP, 273 / SVI VII, 232.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 1163 See SKS K7, 243–244.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 1164 It is unlikely, because when it came to the issue of infant Baptism, Kierkegaard expressed his agreement with Mynster in a letter to his brother, who as a pastor of the state church did not want to force the Baptists to let their children to be baptized. Kierkegaard wrote: ‘If you were not the party involved, I would say, ‘I wish it would come to that and that the Bishop would win.’ Now I am far from wishing this, although you know how much I agree with the Bishop.’ (LD, 177 / B&A, 139. From the letter no. 116 to P.C. Kierkegaard, February 10, 1845.)} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 1165 Mt 16:18–19 and 28:16–20.} \]
is certainly not merely the external fact that one was baptized at eleven o'clock on September 7.” \(^{1166}\) The point of Climacus is that baptism must be appropriated in faith: “What is Baptism without appropriation \([\text{Tilegnelse}]\)? It is the possibility that the baptized child can become a Christian, neither more nor less.” Climacus claims that appropriation is precisely what is essential in Lutheranism: “Take appropriation away from the essentially Christian, and what is Luther’s merit then?” \(^{1167}\)

The position that Climacus explicates as the correct Christian one seems, then, to be: Sacraments are holy as expressions of the free spiritual relationship between God, who is a subject, \(^{1168}\) and human individuals, who are likewise subjects; however, there is no magical causation through these established practices outside the sphere of subjectivity, so that the events in the objective sphere would in themselves guarantee the eternal happiness of a human spirit without its participating in them through faith. Climacus clearly holds it as a mistake if a Christian tries “to find repose not in a spiritual relationship with God in freedom...but in an external event.” He characterizes this as an attempt “to hold the temptation away by means of [the] magical Baptism and not to want to permeate it with faith.” \(^{1169}\)

When it comes to attaining the true spiritual relation to God, baptism and other public practices eventually weigh for Climacus less than the personal ethical-religious development that prepares the individual for faith. Climacus writes: “A Jewish child, a pagan child, brought up from the beginning by tender Christian foster

\(^{1166}\) CUP, 367–368 / SVI VII, 318.

\(^{1167}\) CUP, 366 / SVI VII, 317.

\(^{1168}\) See CUP, 199–200 / SVI VII, 167; “The existing person who chooses the objective way now enters upon all approximating deliberation to bring forth God objectively, which is not achieved in all eternity, because God is a subject and hence only for subjectivity in inwardness.”

\(^{1169}\) CUP, 45 / SVI VII, 33.
parents who treat the child just as lovingly as parents treat their own child, will appropriate the same Christianity as the baptized child." Climacus also notes that baptism cannot substitute for the ethical-religious development that prepares the individual for the decision through which he binds himself to Christ: it does not "make the child older in understanding nor mature it for decision." In other words, infant baptism does not actually make the infant into a Christian, but creates a possibility for an actual decision in the later age. "Infant Baptism can very well be defensible and commendable both as the Church’s well-intentioned interest, a safeguard against fanatics, and as the beautiful, providential care of pious parents—the responsibility lies on the individual himself in a later stage," states Climacus. Actually to become a Christian is a decision that “belongs to a much later age,” to adulthood and maturity. Even for the baptized person there must, therefore, come “a later moment when he, although a Christian, asks what Christianity is—in order to become a Christian.”

With respect to the ethical-religious development of the individual and to his decision with regard to Christianity, other human beings become at a certain point helpless. The parents cannot force their child into Christianity and neither can the officials of the state. They may just create the occasion, and then let the individual develop and make his decision when the “fullness of time” arrives for him. Climacus writes:

Christianity cannot be poured into a child, because it always holds true that every human being grasps only what he has use for, and the child has no decisive use for Christianity. The law is continually that

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1170 CUP, 601 / SVI VII, 523.
1171 CUP, 365 / SVI VII, 316.
1172 CUP, 363 / SVI VII, 315.
1173 CUP, 601 / SVI VII, 523.
1174 CUP, 373 / SVI VII, 323.
which Christianity’s entrance into the world through what preceded it indicates: \textit{No one begins with being Christian; each one becomes that in the fullness of time—if one becomes that.}\textsuperscript{1175}

Climacus already explained in \textit{Philosophical Fragments} the reason why human beings may only create occasions for other human beings to become Christians. There is no way to “naturalize” the historical fact that forms the basis of faith. Thus, no one is born with faith or brought up in faith directly by his culture and society. If the individual has faith, he has it by virtue of the condition that he receives personally from the god himself.\textsuperscript{1176} In \textit{Postscript} Climacus maintains the same: “[T]here is no direct and immediate transition to Christianity, and...therefore all those who in that way want to give a rhetorical push in order to bring one into Christianity or even help one into it by a thrashing—they are all deceivers—no, they know not what they do.”\textsuperscript{1177}

However, while becoming a Christian demands free development and a leap on the part of subject, these do not take place in isolation from the historical and social surroundings. The development that Christianity requires from the individual is the ethical-religious development through the stages of existence that Climacus describes in \textit{Postscript}. Climacus writes: “Religiousness \textit{A} must first be present in the individual before there can be any consideration of becoming aware of the dialectical \textit{B}...[B]efore there can be any question at all of simply becoming in the situation of becoming aware of [the essentially Christian] one must first of all exist in Religiousness \textit{A}.”\textsuperscript{1178} But the individual does not reach the stage of Religiousness \textit{A} before he has made his way through the aesthetic, ironic, and ethical stages preceding it. And as has been

\textsuperscript{1175} \textit{CUP}, 590–591 / \textit{SV I VII}, 514. (Translation slightly altered.)
\textsuperscript{1176} See \textit{PF}, 94–104 / \textit{SV I IV}, 257–266.
\textsuperscript{1178} \textit{CUP}, 556–557 / \textit{SV I VII}, 486.
shown above in chapters 2 and 4, this individual ethical-religious
development takes place in the historical and social actuality, where
the aesthetic individual finds himself situated in the beginning and
where the ethical-religious individual continually remains as he
struggles towards the eternal.

The idea of Climacus seems to be that, if this development is
carried out properly, “in the fullness of time” the individual will
have “decisive use for Christianity.” The individual does not
become a Christian just through a pious appropriation of the
Christian doctrine. If the ethical-religious life of the subject is not
behind it, the pathos of appropriation remains just a “pathos of
immediacy”—an arbitrary passion that could attach itself to what-
ever doctrine is offered as its object. In order to be adequate for
the objective content of Christianity, the passion of the individual
must first go through dialectical ethical-religious development. If
this is the case, then the individual is ready for the desperate way
out that Christianity offers to him. Then, claims Climacus,
there is only one object that satisfies the inwardness of the subject,
only one object that fits the “how” of faith, namely, Christ.
Hence, while Climacus rejects the sure path of the methodical and
objective science, he believes that there is a sure method that leads
the individual to the truth—the dialectic of the ethical-religious
life that unfolds itself in the given historical actuality.

To sum up: For the believer there cannot be any secure objec-
tive stronghold either in the Bible or in “the Living Word in the
Church, in the Creed, and in the Word with the sacraments.”
When one builds an eternal happiness on something historical,
faith must always be involved, and faith belongs to subjectivity.

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1180 CUP, 608–609 / SVI VII, 530.
1182 CUP, 610 and 613–614 n / SVI VII, 532 and 534 n.
Since “Christianity is spirit,” the decision through which the individual becomes a Christian is rooted in subjectivity.” This “subjectivist” position does not, however, deny that the subjective inwardness of the individual must be related to the given historical actuality—it just maintains that the given historical actuality must be related to the subjective inwardness of the Christian. Even if the decision of faith is rooted in subjectivity, it takes place in the context of historical actuality and obviously could not take place without it.

The historical, on which the Christian builds his eternal happiness, is eventually Christ. But as in Philosophical Fragments, so in Postscript it is the Socratic position that prepares the ground and tunes up the passion of the subject for the happy encounter with Christ. The Socratic ignorance keeps hold of the objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite: “I observe nature in order to find God, and I do indeed see omnipotence and wisdom, but I also see much that troubles and disturbs. The summa summarum of this is an objective uncertainty, but the inwardness is so great, precisely because it grasps this objective uncertainty with all the passion of the infinite.” Here in Socratic ignorance “truth is subjectivity” inasmuch as truth does not have its stronghold in the objective reality, but in the paradoxical passion of the existing subject. But this is precisely what is typical to belief (Tro). For belief the truth is “an objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness.”

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1184 CUP, 33 / SVI VII, 21.

1185 Here I hold onto the terms that were introduced in subdivision 5.1.2 on basis of Philosophical Fragments: “belief” (Tro) = belief that the eternal spirit manifests itself in the historical actuality; “faith” (Tro) = belief in Christ. It should be noted that neither the Danish original nor the English translation of Postscript by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong makes this terminological distinction.

passion was typical to Socrates and so we may very well also speak of belief and the paradox in connection with Socrates, claims Climacus.\(^{1187}\)

However, this belief that paradoxically holds onto the eternal in time only prepares the way for the Christian belief, i.e. for faith (\textit{Tro}). The latter is directed to the historical event, in which the eternal itself defines itself “as a temporality, as in time, as historical.”\(^{1188}\) If it is already paradoxical that an existing subject like Socrates, who is aware that he exists in terms of temporality and finitude, all the same believes that in his inwardness he has a relation to the eternal truth,\(^{1189}\) here the eternal truth itself becomes the paradox by coming into existence in time, explains Climacus.\(^{1190}\) This, “that the by-nature eternal comes into existence in time, is born, grows up, and dies,” is the absolute paradox that breaks with all thinking.\(^{1191}\) Hence, in the Christian faith the individual does not have faith in what is uncertain only—in what transcends all knowledge—but in what is absurd.\(^{1192}\) “A believer is infinitely interested in the actuality of another” and this interestedness is “absolute dependence on the object of faith.” But at the same time the object of his faith, “that the god has existed as an individual human being,” breaks against his understanding.\(^{1193}\) Thus, in contrast to the Socratic belief, the Christian faith must be defined as “the objective uncertainty with the repulsion of the absurd, held fast in the passion of inwardness.” As the “how” of subjectivity this is what corresponds to “the absolute paradox” as the object.\(^{1194}\)

\(^{1187}\) \textit{CUP}, 207 n / \textit{SVI VII}, 173 n.
\(^{1189}\) \textit{CUP}, 199 / \textit{SVI VII}, 166.
\(^{1190}\) \textit{CUP}, 209 / \textit{SVI VII}, 175.
\(^{1194}\) \textit{CUP}, 610–611 / \textit{SVI VII}, 532. (Italics have been added.)
The view of faith is in all essentials the same in Postscript as in Philosophical Fragments. But now Climacus emphasizes the absurdity and incomprehensibility of the object of faith even more strongly, with the result that happiness, which presumably also still characterizes this passion, tends to fall out of the picture. In Philosophical Fragments it was “the paradox” that made the understanding absurd, namely, the offended understanding that lacked the happy passion of faith. In Postscript Climacus emphasizes that even for the believer the paradox remains incomprehensible and that the possibility of offense will always be there for him.

With regard to the poetic and passionate situatedness of faith in the historical actuality, however, Climacus has not changed his view. The way he describes the love affair of the paradox and faith in Postscript just leaves it a bit more open what gives the incentive for God to become a human being, but otherwise the description resembles the love story in Philosophical Fragments:

1195 Cf. also CUP, 561 / SV1 VII, 490: “What can and shall and will be the absolute paradox, the absurd, the incomprehensible, depends on the passion in dialectically holding fast the distinction of incomprehensibility.” Or CUP, 569 / SV1 VII, 496: “The dialectical aspect of the issue requires thought-passion—not to want to understand it but to understand what it means to break in this way with the understanding and thinking and immanence, in order then to lose the last foothold of immanence, the eternity behind, and to exist, situated at the edge of existence, by virtue of the absurd.” Or CUP, 578 / SV1 VII, 504: “I, if I am to understand, can neither before nor afterward come to understand anything else except that it goes against all thinking.”

1196 PF, 52–54 / SV1 IV, 218–221.

1197 See, for example, CUP, 557–558, 585, and 609 / SV1 VII, 486–487, 510, and 530–531. Perhaps the shift of emphasis results only from the effort of Climacus to now relate personally, as a subject, to the paradox of Christianity, so that the abstract though-project of Fragments now becomes an actual possibility for him. In Postscript Climacus underscores that “Christianity as a proposal [Projekt] is not difficult to understand—the difficulty and the paradox is that it is actual.” (CUP, 580 / SV1 VII, 506.)
If...subjectivity is truth and subjectivity is the existing subjectivity, then, if I may put it this way, Christianity has seized its opportunity [Christendommen har passet sit Snit]. Subjectivity culminates in passion, Christianity is paradox; paradox and passion fit each other perfectly, and paradox perfectly fits a person situated in the extremity of existence. Indeed, in the whole wide world there are not to be found two lovers who fit each other as do paradox and passion, and their quarrel is only like the lovers’ quarrel when the quarrel is about whether it was he who awakened her passion or it was she who awakened his—and similarly here, the existing person has been situated in the extremity of existence by the paradox itself.\textsuperscript{1198}

In \textit{Philosophical Fragments} the poet maintained unequivocally that the love that the god has for human beings is the only motive that explains his incarnation.\textsuperscript{1199} Here Climacus is more cautious and equivocal. He admits that from God’s point of view the story might turn out differently, but maintains that \textit{from the point of view of the adoring human individual} it is God that brings the passion of the individual to its extreme. If anything, the new formulation underscores the role of the free, poetic, impassioned imagination in the apprehension and interpretation of the historical event of incarnation. For the existing subject, there is no objective view available in regard to the event, but the impassioned subjectivity always understands the event in a determinate way.

In \textit{Postscript} Climacus also analyzes how the apprehension of the absolute paradox reflects back into the subject and \textit{qualifies and intensifies the passion} in him. In the Christian existence the passion for the eternal is brought into relation to such historical objects that consist of something that can become historical only “by virtue of the absurd.”\textsuperscript{1200} In consequence, the passion of the subject is brought to its extreme, sharpened (skærpet), and intensi-

\textsuperscript{1198} \textit{CUP}, 230 / \textit{SV\textsuperscript{I} VII}, 193.
\textsuperscript{1199} \textit{PF}, 24–25 / \textit{SV\textsuperscript{I} IV}, 193–194.
\textsuperscript{1200} \textit{CUP}, 575 and 578 / \textit{SV\textsuperscript{I} VII}, 501 and 504.
fied \((\text{potenseret})\) to its highest.\textsuperscript{1203} Part of this is also that the forms of negative pathos typical to Religiousness \(A\) become further qualified. The eternal guilt-consciousness becomes qualified by the consciousness of sin, suffering in one’s relation to the eternal becomes qualified by suffering from the possibility of offense, and the passion that orientates toward the absolute and tries to overcome the relativities of finitude becomes qualified by the pain of sympathy. In the following we shall investigate consciousness of sin, the possibility of offense, the pain of sympathy as essential characteristics of Christian situatedness.

In \textit{Philosophical Fragments} Climacus maintained that the god as a teacher makes the human being recollect his \textit{sin}.\textsuperscript{1202} “To this act,” writes Climacus, “the Socratic principle applies: the teacher is only an occasion.”\textsuperscript{1203} In \textit{Postscript} Climacus underscores that the existing person does not discover the consciousness of sin by himself but gets to know it from outside.\textsuperscript{1204} This distinguishes the consciousness of sin from guilt-consciousness:

The individual is therefore unable to gain the consciousness of sin by himself, which is the case with guilt-consciousness... The consciousness of sin... is a change of the subject himself, which shows that outside the individual there must be the power that makes clear to him that by coming into existence he has become a person other than he was, that he has become a sinner. This power is the god in time.\textsuperscript{1205}

Climacus does not explain how the god in time “makes clear” to the individual that just “by coming into existence” he has become a sinner. It is not hard to imagine that the personal encounter with the god makes the individual feel that he is a sinner, but how does...
the individual advance from this preliminary intuition to the conviction that by coming into existence he has already become a sinner? My interpretation is that the belief that the god has come to reconcile the sin of all human individuals posits the dogma of hereditary sin. In that the individual appropriates this dogma he will then recollect that he has been in sin from the beginning. This interpretation receives some support from the statement of Climacus that in “the paradoxical-religious” the race becomes higher than the individual “by virtue of the paradox.”

To interpret, it is the belief in the paradox of the god in time that posits the dogma of hereditary sin, and according to this dogma the human race stands higher than the human individual in the sense that the individual receives the spiritual quality of sin just by being a member of the race. If this is the correct interpretation, the view would differ from the view in Philosophical Fragments only in that here the consciousness of sin does not precede faith, but derives from it.

The differences are clearer between the conceptions of sin in The Concept of Anxiety and in Postscript. According to the former work, no one is a sinner just by belonging to the human race: an innocent child is not in sin before he falls in sin. However, in Postscript Climacus maintains that according to the Christian view “the beginning is that subjectivity is untruth,” in other words, that the individual “is born in sin and as a sinner.” Climacus writes: “The sentimental view of the child’s innocence forgets that Christianity does not acknowledge anything like that in fallen humankind...The rigorously Christian conception of the child as sinner

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1206 See CUP, 554 n.2 / SVI VII, 483 n.2. (The footnote in question was quoted in full above in subdivision 5.1.1.)

1207 However, as was noted in a footnote earlier, there is also a passage in Postscript that seems to suggest that the consciousness of sin must precede the seeing of the truth of Christianity; see CUP, 279 / SVI VII, 238.

1208 CUP, 208 / SVI VII, 174–175. (Italics have been added.)
cannot provide the period of childhood with any advantage, because the child has no consciousness of sin and therefore is a sinner without the consciousness of sin.”

In contrast to Vigilius, Climacus consistently maintains that by being born into the human race the individual already becomes a sinner. This is, according to Climacus, hereditary sin, of which the individual becomes conscious (only) through faith in Christ. Climacus writes that through his faith the Christian regards sin as “existence-medium,” so that “to come into existence” means for him “to become a sinner.” The individual who exist is a sinner by existing, and not by his own fault. Through the encounter with Christ the individual only gains the consciousness of sin and hereditary sin, that is, he realizes that he was in sin and “expands the consciousness of sin to the whole race.”

Can these views of Climacus be reconciled with those of Vigilius Haufniensis? There is, at least, a terminological difference. In contrast to Climacus, Vigilius would not write that the individual is born a sinner, but would at most maintain that he is born a potential sinner, that is, a member of the sinful race. Vigilius maintains that in a state of innocence, that is, in a state of ignorance, the individual is not conscious of his sinfulness, and that only when he falls in sin he actually posits sinfulness in himself and in the world. On the other hand, just like Climacus, Vigilius, too, maintains that “the consciousness of sin was first posited by Christianity.”

Hence, the difference between Haufniensis and Climacus is at least the terminological one that Climacus does not make the dis-

1209 CUP, 592 / SVI VII, 515.
1210 CUP, 583 / SVI VII, 508.
1211 CUP, 208 / SVI VII, 175.
1214 CA, 93 / SVI IV, 363.
tinctions between sinfulness and sin, between the state of sinfulness as a possibility and the “qualitative leap” of the fall as an actuality. But, on the other hand, Climacus does advocate a distinction between possibility and actuality, and he maintains that the past and the future actuality and the actuality of the other individuals exist for the individual only in the form of possibility.\textsuperscript{1215} Furthermore, the Christian view is for Climacus a possibility offered for the individual that he may either believe in, or not believe in.\textsuperscript{1216} Only when the individual actually accepts this possibility in faith does he become certain of the sin in himself and in other human beings.\textsuperscript{1217} Consequently, if not on the level of terminology, on the level of ideas Climacus and Vigilius could still be seen to come into partial agreement with each other: the Christian, and only the Christian, comes to see in the light of his faith that the whole of humanity lies in the state of untruth, that is, in the state of sin / sinfulness.

But, besides this terminological difference, there is also the difference that in Postscript Climacus does not recognize the fall in sin as an event in the history of the individual as Vigilius does in The Concept of Anxiety, but regards sin as a state. For Vigilius sin is not a state in which the individual finds himself, but a “qualitative leap” that the individual commits. Vigilius maintains that sin cannot be considered as a state, at least not in the way a psychologist is tempted to do: “If sin is dealt with in psychology, the... concept becomes a different concept, for sin becomes a state. However, sin is not a state. Its idea is that its concept is continually annulled. As a state (\textit{de potentia}), it is not, but \textit{de actu} or \textit{in actu} it is, again and again.”\textsuperscript{1218} While anxiety is a state, and as such is a possibility for action, sin is considered by Vigilius as the actuality, as the leap that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1215} \textit{CUP}, 316, 321, and 322 / \textit{SV} VII, 271, 276, and 277.
\item \textsuperscript{1216} \textit{CUP}, 15–16 / \textit{SV} VII, 6–7.
\item \textsuperscript{1217} \textit{CUP}, 583–584 / \textit{SV} VII, 508–509.
\item \textsuperscript{1218} \textit{CA}, 15 / \textit{SV} IV, 288.
\end{itemize}
the free and responsible subject makes in this state.\textsuperscript{1219} The reason why Vigilius insist on sin being a leap and not a state is ethical. Ethics demands that sin be considered as an act of freedom, for which the human individual bears responsibility and therefore ethics prohibits the science of psychology to explain this “qualitative leap” as a necessary consequence that follows from the previous states of the individual.\textsuperscript{1220}

However, in \textit{Postscript}, and indeed already in \textit{Philosophical Fragments},\textsuperscript{1221} Johannes Climacus writes that sin is a state. He writes that sin as “a state in a human being” is “the dreadful exemption from doing the ethical, the individual’s heterogeneity with the ethical.” The individual finds himself “in a state exactly opposite to what the ethical requires” with the consequence that the ethical “is present at every moment with its infinite requirement but the individual is not capable of fulfilling it.”\textsuperscript{1222} What is puzzling is that the context of these statements is the very passage in “A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature” in which Climacus explains the ideas presented in \textit{The Concept of Anxiety}. But disregarding the distinction between the qualitative leap of sin and the psychological state of anxiety, Climacus seems to identify the state of anxiety with the state of sin. Sin as “a state in a human being” is “the dreadful exemption from doing the ethical” and anxiety is “the teleologically suspended person’s state of mind in that desperate exemption from fulfilling the ethical.”\textsuperscript{1223}

The context of the statements suggests that Climacus, at least, does not see any essential difference between his conception of sin

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1219} See, for example, \textit{CA}, 32 and 113 / \textit{SV I} IV, 304 and 381.
\textsuperscript{1220} \textit{CA}, 35–37 / \textit{SV I} IV, 306–309. See also \textit{CA}, 21–22 / \textit{SV I} IV, 294.
\textsuperscript{1221} In one passage of \textit{Philosophical Fragments} Climacus writes: “But this state—to be untruth and to be that through one’s own fault—what can we call it? Let us call it \textit{sin}.” (\textit{PF}, 15 / \textit{SV I} IV, 185.)
\textsuperscript{1223} \textit{CUP}, 267 and 269 / \textit{SV VII} VII, 227 and 228.
\end{footnotesize}
and that of Vigilius. And it is indeed possible to find in *The Concept of Anxiety*, too, passages in which sin is considered as an unconsciously or semiconsciously sustained state. First of all, Vigilius notes that “viewed from the standpoint of spirit” the state in which the qualitative leap of sin does not break forth is a “state...of sinfulness,” and that explains why “Christian orthodoxy has always taught that paganism lay in sin,” even if “the consciousness of sin was first posited by Christianity.” Second, Vigilius suggests that, from the point of view of faith, the state of anxiety itself is a new sin, that is, remaining in the state of anxiety is a sin. Finally, he claims that anxiety about evil tends to lead into constant repetition of sin and that anxiety about the good constantly defends itself against freedom and the good. To interpret, sin actively produces an obstinate state of untruth that could be called the state of sin even in the framework of *The Concept of Anxiety*. In other words, one who does not move through faith toward the good, freedom, and truth, but remains persistently in the state of anxiety, is in the state of sin. This does not mean that sin is a (simple, natural, passive) psychological state, but that sin as an activity of the spirit constantly produces the state of sin.

If we disregard the terminological differences, the only substantial difference would then be that Climacus does not recognize the existence of the qualitative leap of fall. From his point of view the human individual is in sin *immanently*, just by participating in the sinful human race, and, therefore, the initial situatedness of the individual is to exist in sin. The view makes the subject more passive when it comes to the initial existing in sin. But we should note that, at the same time, the view binds the individual even more tightly to the history of the race. In this respect, then, the “subjec-

1224 *CA*, 93 / *SV* IV, 363.
1225 *CA*, 117 / *SV* IV, 385.
tivist” Postscript is less subjectivist than The Concept of Anxiety: it has a stronger concept of hereditary sin and, hence, it emphasizes more the passive situatedness of the subject.

On the other hand, the subject should not remain in this initial situatedness, i.e. in the immanent state of sin, in which he finds himself, and here also the activity of the individual is needed. The individual is not liberated from the body of sin just by being born, baptized, and brought up in a so-called Christian country. Christendom is, according to Climacus, an illusion: “The reliability of the eighteen centuries, the fact that Christianity has permeated all relations of life, reshaped the world, etc., this reliability is just an illusion.”

It is a dangerous illusion, since “in Christendom (the dubiousness of speculative thought on the one hand and that one is a Christian as a matter of course on the other), it becomes more and more difficult to find a point of departure if one wants to know what Christianity is…” In order to become free from the illusion of Christendom, the individual must emancipate himself from the illusions of objective reflection. He must overcome “the sin of understanding,” the “half measures” of understanding that keep him from becoming a true Christian.

To perform this he must “self-actively transform an initial being-Christian into a possibility in order to become Christian in truth.”

Climacus explains that to bring this out was the reason he took as his point of departure in Philosophical Fragments Greek paganism and Socrates. He explains: “As soon as the transitional situation is made contemporary with the entry of Christianity into the world or with its introduction into a pagan country, everything will be clear. To become a Christian then becomes the most terrible of all

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1228 CUP, 47 / SVI VII, 35.
1229 CUP, 368 / SVI VII, 319.
1231 CUP, 365 / SVI VII, 316.
1232 CUP, 368 / SVI VII, 319.
decisions in a person’s life, since it is a matter of winning faith through despair and offense...

Inasmuch as Greek paganism represents the human point of view and the state that is natural for sinful human beings, then it is this hard work with despair and offense, “the work of inwardness in becoming and continuing to be a Christian,” that should be also experienced in the Christian countries by those who leave sinfulness behind and become Christians. But why? Why would existing as a Christian be so difficult once Christianity has been publicly established? First, because the single individual, who exists in constant becoming, does not constantly participate in the eternal truth without actively struggling to do so. Due to the transitoriness and uncertainty that result from the process of becoming, the individual would have to struggle in his personal existence, even if everything were in solid and impeccable Christian order around him. Thus, in order to exist as a Christian, he must even in Christendom constantly become a Christian. Second, the Christian has to struggle in inwardness, because Christianity is spirit and spirit is inwardness. Even when the truth is given in the historical actuality outside him in the form of books, buildings, and practices, the individual still has the task of spiritual appropriation. The concrete forms in which Christianity materializes in the external world cannot substitute for the appropriation of Christianity in the subjective inwardness. The inward activity remains all decisive for the salvation of the individual. Third, the Christian has to struggle to be a Christian, because according to the Christian faith sin remains an integral part of individual existence and, therefore, existing as a Christian will always be a task that brings the individual in despair and offends his understanding. Thus,

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1235 CUP, 372 / SVI VII, 322.
1234 CUP, 373 / SVI VII, 323.
1236 CUP, 33 / SVI VII, 21.
even if the doctrine of Christianity and its sacred books and practices represented the divine truth without being corrupted and obscured by the sinful human individuals in any way whatsoever, for those sinful individuals themselves the medicine that they contain must appear as poison. If this difficulty is not acknowledged and faced, then those forms that potentially create a possibility for becoming a Christian may actually become a hiding place for sin: the formal conformism comes to hide the opposition in inwardness.\footnote{Cf. \textit{CUP}, 47–49 / \textit{SVI} VII, 35–37.}

In the context of Christendom, then, to place the emphasis on the individual subject the way Climacus does is \textit{not to defend subjective arbitrariness}. It is not to defend the right of the subject to live as he pleases according to his arbitrary tastes, but to demand the individual sinner lives up to the ideal he publicly professes. As was noted above, “it is Christianity itself that attaches an enormous importance to the individual subject; it wants to be involved with him, him alone and in the same way with each one individually.”\footnote{\textit{CUP}, 49 / \textit{SVI} VII, 36.} If Christianity represents the truth, this intrusiveness of Christianity into his private sphere is, of course, eventually for the best of the individual, since without faith he will perish. But for a sinner it remains a troublesome affair to exist in relation to Christianity. To exist with the Christian faith and consciousness of sin simultaneously is to exist in a contradiction and to put one’s faith constantly in the paradoxical.

For example, \textit{the forgiveness of sins} that annuls the past of the individual must remain a paradox for the individual, and he will never be able to gain full certainty with regard to it, but “must be satisfied with a struggling certainty.” Climacus writes that if existing itself is stamped by sin, then the poor existing human being remains “half-godforsaken even when in the inwardness of faith he
is victorious against understanding.”

With understanding in direct opposition, the inwardness of faith must press forward. He must try to appropriate the paradox of the forgiveness of sins that annuls the past and holds the promise of the eternal that awaits. In this way faith must battle, as the Romans once battled, “blinded by the light of the sun.”

Or, to use another metaphor, when the ship has sprung a leak by running aground in sin and the human understanding, “like a desperate passenger, stretches its arms toward land,” faith shall work vigorously in the depths and enthusiastically keep the ship afloat by pumping; it shall not seek the harbor, but against the understanding rescue the soul.

The existence of the Christian is paradoxical and absurd, because he does not participate anymore in the dialectical movement that centers within himself. He has come to participate in what could be called a Christocentric dialectic, in which he becomes determined by an external Other that he cannot comprehend. Climacus writes that what thrusts the Christian down into the pathos of the absurd is that he has “the dialectical in the second place (seundo loco).” In the dialectical movement it is no longer the subject that overcomes obstacles through his infinite striving; it is the god in time who overcomes, and the sinful subject is himself the obstacle, the other that is both cancelled and preserved. In the immanent ethical-religious existence the individual grounds his eternal happiness on the eternal that he finds within himself. But in Christianity “the upbuilding is something outside the individual” and “the paradox is that this apparently esthetic relation-

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1239 CUP, 226 / SVI VII, 190.
1240 CUP, 224 / SVI VII, 188–189.
1241 CUP, 225 n / SVI VII, 189 n.
1242 Kierkegaard’s theological thought has been characterized as “Christocentric” in Rose 2001.
ship...nevertheless is to be the absolute relationship with God.”

In putting his trust in Christ, the Christian breaks with his understanding and thinking and with immanence in general.

According to Climacus, in his era, “whose tolerance or indifference is so great,” it might be possible that an actual Christian would be allowed to live in peace. But, all the same, the Christian still has to suffer the martyrdom of faith: to believe in Christ against his understanding.

The martyrdom of faith is that the individual has to crucify his understanding, and this is “not a martyrdom of the moment, but the martyrdom of continuance.”

The task of the existing Christian is “to relate oneself day in and day out to something upon which one bases one’s eternal happiness, while maintaining the passion with which one understands that one cannot understand.”

In consequence the possibility of offense belongs as a constant element to the existence of the Christian. “For the believer,” writes Climacus, “offense comes at the beginning, and the possibility of it is the continual fear and trembling in his existence.” As soon as the Christian loses the passion of faith, he is offended, and if he becomes offended, he will fall as much deeper below the religiousness of immanence as faith is higher than it.

The incomprehensible object of faith, the incomprehensible dogma of hereditary sin, and the incomprehensible paradox of the forgiveness of sins, are not the only incomprehensible elements in Christianity that may offend the human understanding. From the paradox of the god in time there follows a host of “dialectical contradictions.” Among these is the absolute contradiction between

\[1244\] CUP, 560–561 / SVI VII, 489.
\[1245\] CUP, 569 / SVI VII, 496.
\[1246\] CUP, 567 / SVI VII, 494.
\[1247\] CUP, 559 / SVI VII, 487–488.
\[1248\] CUP, 558 n / SVI VII, 487 n.
\[1249\] CUP, 585 / SVI VII, 510. (Translation slightly altered.)
Chapter 6: The Christian Sphere

here and hereafter that results when the eternal comes into existence at a moment of time. Climacus points out that, because “the eternal itself has entered time and wants to establish kinship there,” the Christian can no longer have faith in “immanent underlying kinship between the temporal and the eternal” as the ethical-religious individual has. In consequence, he will exist in opposition to what is immanent and pin his hope on what comes hereafter.\footnote{CUP, 570–573 / SVI VII, 497–499.} Thus, there is a break in history. The ethical-religious individual builds his life on his immanent relation to the eternal and this is the precondition for reaching the point in which he may become a Christian. But now the immanent relation turns out to be broken. And, yet, Climacus seems to think that the Religiousness $A$, which builds on the immanent God-relationship, must remain as an element in the Christian Religiousness $B$, which builds on the paradox that breaks this relationship. As noted above in chapter 4, he writes that the difficulty consists in combining the pathos-filled $A$ with the paradoxical $B$,\footnote{CUP, 386 / SVI VII, 334.} and that every Christian has pathos as in Religiousness $A$, and in addition to that the pathos of separation typical to Religiousness $B$.\footnote{CUP, 582 / SVI VII, 507. Here it should be noted that the idea of Climacus cannot be that the appearance of the god in time means that God is not at all present in his creation. Rather, his view must be that, even if the will of God is corrupted by human sinfulness, it is still somehow, at least negatively, present in the creation, that is, both in human soul and the world external to it. If it were not so, how could anxiety, despair, and other negative phenomena of the human soul be interpreted in the light of faith? Recollection must offer for the human individual a complementary way to comprehend his relation to the eternal. The point of Climacus must be just that the Christian no longer relies on his immanent knowledge alone, but has in Christ his standard of truth and the key for interpreting the immanently given.}\footnote{CUP, 582 / SVI VII, 507. Here it should be noted that the idea of Climacus cannot be that the appearance of the god in time means that God is not at all present in his creation. Rather, his view must be that, even if the will of God is corrupted by human sinfulness, it is still somehow, at least negatively, present in the creation, that is, both in human soul and the world external to it. If it were not so, how could anxiety, despair, and other negative phenomena of the human soul be interpreted in the light of faith? Recollection must offer for the human individual a complementary way to comprehend his relation to the eternal. The point of Climacus must be just that the Christian no longer relies on his immanent knowledge alone, but has in Christ his standard of truth and the key for interpreting the immanently given.}

On the other hand, the temporal existence that precedes death receives an all-decisive significance for the Christian as it turns out...
to be what decides his eternal happiness. In Christianity, writes Climacus, “existing, although even lower by being paradoxically accentuated [as sin], is nevertheless so much higher that I first become eternal in existence, and as a result existing gives rise by itself to a qualification that is infinitely higher than existing.” That does not easily fit in with human understanding, either. And neither does the consequence that follows from it, namely, that “the individual, who was not eternal, now becomes eternal.” This is really paradoxical since, as Climacus points out, to become eternal means to become something that has the dialectic “that as soon as it is it must have been.” Therefore, it is contrary to all thinking that one can become eternal although one was not eternal.\textsuperscript{1253}

To this is connected the contradiction of rebirth. Climacus explains that the individual, who is already born, is born again, and that “becoming a Christian begins with the miracle of creation and...this happens to someone who is created.” The notion does not offend only human understanding, but also ethical consciousness, since the rebirth separates the individual from the rest of humanity, including his father and mother. Even after the rebirth the individual should remain in the world and keep living with the pagans and attempting to communicate his faith to them. But its actual communication is not in his power only.\textsuperscript{1254} Therefore, the existence of the Christian is emotionally painful. The Christian is bound to have both the pathos that belongs to the ethical-religious existence and the pathos that results from the appearance of the God in time, but these are in contradiction with each other. Climacus writes:

\begin{quote}
The religiousness that does not have something dialectical in second place, namely \textit{Religiousness} \textit{A},...is oriented toward the purely human in such a way that it must be assumed that every human being,\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1253} \textit{CUP}, 573 / \textit{SV II} VII, 500.
\textsuperscript{1254} \textit{CUP}, 576 / \textit{SV II} VII, 502.
viewed essentially, participates in this eternal happiness and finally becomes eternally happy...

Religiousness is isolating, separating, is polemical. Only on this condition do I become blessed, and as I absolutely bind myself to it, I thereby exclude everyone else. This is the impetus of particularism in the ordinary passion.\textsuperscript{1255}

While happy for the blessing that has fallen to his lot, the Christian must be unhappy in his awareness that his fellow humans have (apparently) been excluded from it. Therefore “the Christian’s good fortune is distinguished by suffering.”\textsuperscript{1256}

The fact that the Christian cannot ignore is that the happiness “linked to a historical condition excludes all who are outside the condition, and among those are the countless ones who are excluded through no fault of their own but by the accidental circumstance that Christianity has not yet been proclaimed to them.”\textsuperscript{1257}

Given the view of Climacus that Christendom is just an illusion and that many so-called Christians actually have their life in aesthetic categories, the number of the excluded ones is bound to be even greater. Climacus writes:

The believer expands the consciousness of sin to the whole race and at the same time does not know the whole race to be saved, inasmuch as the single individual’s salvation indeed depends on his being brought into relation to that historical event, which precisely because it is historical cannot be everywhere at once but uses time in order to become known to human beings, during which time one generation after the other dies.\textsuperscript{1258}

The Christian is, therefore, bound to experience the pathos that Climacus calls \textit{the pain of sympathy}. If with the passion of his

\textsuperscript{1255} \textit{CUP}, 581–582 / \textit{SVI VII}, 507.
\textsuperscript{1256} \textit{CUP}, 582–583 / \textit{SVI VII}, 508.
\textsuperscript{1257} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1258} \textit{CUP}, 584–585 / \textit{SVI VII}, 509.
whole soul he bases his happiness on the relation to Christ, he “cannot at the same time regard this condition [of faith] as nonsense.” For him “it holds true that outside this condition there is no eternal happiness, and for him it holds true, or it can come to hold true for him, that he must hate father and mother.” Consequently, he is in pain. Climacus writes: “He can be willing to do his utmost for them, to fulfill all the duties of a faithful son and a faithful lover with the greatest enthusiasm...and yet, if this condition separates them, separates them forever, is it not as if he hated them?”

It is worth noticing that, according to Climacus, the true Christian wills to do his utmost for the others. When it comes to the will to do one’s utmost, Christianity apparently knows no limits. Unlike the Apollo of Delphi, the God of Christians is not a friend of moderation and cares not to keep within the bounds of reason, and the same should be true of the Christians themselves. Climacus writes:

> It is well known that over the temple at Delphi there was also the inscription: *ne quid nimis* [nothing in excess]. This motto is the *summa summarum* of all finite worldly wisdom. If it is supposed to be the maximum, Christianity should immediately be revoked as a juvenile and immature whim. Just try once to apply this *ne quid nimis* to the god who allows himself to be crucified...That maxim, *ne quid nimis*, may be valid in many life relationships, but applied to the absolute passionate relationship, to the absolute *telos*, it is nonsense. On the contrary, the point is absolutely to venture everything, absolutely to stake everything, absolutely to desire the highest *telos*...  

Thus, for example, when it comes to repenting one’s sins the Christian shall know no limits: the regulating principle *ne quid nimis* cannot be applied here. Climacus writes that in the Middle

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Ages it was assumed that four shillings would expiate sins and do for repentance. For a Christian, however, no work in the sphere of finitude and temporality can substitute for the infinite repentance and abolish the consciousness of sin that belongs integrally to, and must remain present in, the consciousness of sin.1261

But how does the infinite impassioned relation to Christ reflect, then, in the external action of the Christian in the finite world and in his relationships with other creatures? The contradictions and the pathos that burdens the Christian existence should, according to the ideal of Climacus, lead the Christian individual into action. For Climacus, Christianity is an “existence-communication” that “expresses an existence-contradiction” in order to communicate an “existence-task.”1262 Climacus maintains that Christianity is not only for thought, as the scientific theology would suggest, and not only for emotions, as the religious rhetoric would suggest, but “for acting and for human beings that exist by virtue of acting.”1263 The problem is, however, what can the Christian do for the good of others?

Since the life of Christ shows that God loves the world and since Christ allowed himself to be crucified for the sake of all human beings, it would seem to follow that, out of love for Christ, the Christian would similarly dedicate his life to do all that he can do in this world to serve his neighbors and to help them find the truth. Climacus writes that in the final qualification of the religious, the paradoxical-religious, the race becomes higher by virtue of the paradox.1264 This implies, I take it, not only that the sin of the race burdens the individual, too. It also implies that whenever the Christian will act, he will act not only for his own sake but also for the sake of the other members of the race. However, Climacus

1261 CUP, 524 / SVI VII, 457.
1263 CUP, 556 / SVI VII, 485.
1264 CUP, 554 n.2 / SVI VII, 483 n.2.
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does not write a lot about the life in the historical actuality that follows after the individual has become a Christian. The little he writes serves only to keep the person within the bounds set for him by his sinful nature and by the given historical situation, the situation of Christendom.

First of all, Climacus denies the possibility of a straightforward identification with and imitation of Christ. He writes:

If God were directly the ideal for being a human being, it would be all right to want to express the direct likeness...But between God and a human being...there is an absolute difference; therefore a person’s absolute relationship with God must specifically express the absolute difference, and the direct likeness becomes impudence, conceited pretense, presumption, and the like.\(^\text{1265}\)

The possibility of imitation of Christ that was tentatively suggested in *Philosophical Fragments* might seem to be closed off here. However, this is not necessarily what Climacus is driving at. Rather, in opposing “the direct likeness” he might be saying that the imitation must always go through a relationship to God that acknowledges the fundamental difference between the human being and God. In that case the idea would be, in essence, the same as in *Philosophical Fragments*, where Climacus also warned against the straightforward attempt to follow Christ and made the right kind of spiritual inwardness into a necessary condition for imitation.\(^\text{1266}\) According to *Postscript*, the basis for Christian action is the relationship of worship (*Tilbedelse*): "Worship is the maximum for a human being’s relationship with God, and thereby for his likeness to God, since the qualities are absolutely different." But

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\(^{1265}\) *CUP*, 412 / *SV1 VII*, 357. The passage is from the chapter that clarifies how the existence is structured within Religiousness *A*. But since Religiousness *A* has also validity within Christianity, it shall be taken into consideration.

\(^{1266}\) Cf. the passage *PF*, 56–57 / *SV1 IV*, 222–223 that was discussed above in subdivision 5.3.
Climacus underscores that to practice the absolute distinction in the form of worship of God “does not necessarily mean that the existing person becomes indifferent to the finite.” Like an adult may join in children’s play “with total interest, may be the one who really makes the game lively,” the person who in his inwardness worships God participates in the life in finitude.\textsuperscript{1267}

The idea that the Christian action in the external world must be enlivened by the inward action of the spirit makes the action in a sense more complicated and difficult. But at the same time the presence of spirit equals \textit{freedom} as it implies liberation from the mechanical imitation of outward models. When one does what one does through the worship of God, one does it freely and the life in the finitude becomes like a children’s game. This idea is familiar to us from the “Ultimatum” of \textit{Either/Or}, where the pastor from Jutland explains that “when you are in love, you are in freedom” and through “your adoration \textit{Tilbedelse}, worship, your devotion, your piety” you are hidden in God.\textsuperscript{1268}

Consequently, the prospect of the imitation and following of Christ is, perhaps, not closed off in \textit{Postscript}, but rather “cancelled and preserved” by the impassioned inwardness of the subject. In a similar way Climacus cancels and preserves the prospect of \textit{equality} between God and human individual that the love of the god created in \textit{Philosophical Fragments}.\textsuperscript{1269} He writes: “It is commonly said that love is able to make the two equal. Yes, that is correct if one is speaking about the relationship of two human beings, because essentially they stand on the same level, and the difference is accidental. But since there is an absolute difference between God and man, this direct equality is a presumptuous, giddying thought...” However, Climacus adds to this immediately: “...that this is so is no comparative human release from the utmost

\textsuperscript{1267} \textit{CUP}, 413 / \textit{SV1 VII}, 358–359.
\textsuperscript{1268} \textit{EO2}, 349–350 / \textit{SV1 II}, 314–315.
His point is simply that the spirit, in which the Christian does his utmost, cannot be that of conceited self-satisfaction from being equal to God. However, it is difficult to say what the Christian “doing one’s utmost” means in individual cases, because the “utmost” is always relative. Hence it is understandable that Climacus does not go into specifics. “Doing one’s utmost” is relative, first of all, to subjectivity. How the subject should act in the external world is relative to the passion that he has. If worship makes him do deeds Christ taught us to do in his speeches and through his personal example, fine. If not, he should rather have recourse to the mercy of God than to force himself violently. Second, the “utmost” that Christianity demands is relative to the capacities and life-situations of the subject. Hence, Climacus does not want to burden the common man with the same inner difficulties with which he burdens the cultured man, who imagines that he has already progressed far beyond Christianity. He writes: “The simplest human being can certainly become a Christian and continue to be one, but partly because he does not have understanding on any great scale, and partly because the simple person’s condition in life turns his attention outward; he is exempted from the laboriousness with which the cultured person sustains his faith…” Similarly, Climacus warns of bringing a child immediately into Christianity in its proper rigorous form. The child must be allowed to play with his childish conceptions of Christ and God until he has become old enough to have the need for more correct ones. Thus, the Christian idea of equality that Climacus champions seems to be as sophisticated as the Marxist one: “From each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs.” Third, the “utmost” that

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1270 CUP, 492 / SV I VII, 427.  
1271 CUP, 607 / SV I VII, 529. See also CUP, 586 / SV I VII, 511–512.  
Christianity demands cannot be defined unequivocally, because it is relative to the historical circumstances. We already noticed above how Climacus acknowledged that in the modern era, “whose tolerance or indifference is so great,” it might be that the Christian does not have to experience persecution in the external world, such as Christ and the martyrs of the early Church experienced in their era. Heroic, external suffering is thus, according to Climacus, accidental, and this the modern Christian must humbly accept. He has to accept that in Christendom it has become impossible to stand out as a Christian.

As in Philosophical Fragments, so in Postscript Climacus maintains that between the Christians the Socratic relationship holds good: there is no disciple-teacher relationship between the Christians inasmuch as Christ is the only teacher and all Christians are his disciples. This means among other things that there cannot exist particular groups among Christians. Climacus writes that “when a Christian (who paradoxically is a follower of the god in time in the sense of being a new creation) within Christianity becomes in turn a follower of this one and that one, this arouses an indirect suspicion that all his Christianity is very likely a bit of esthetic nonsense.” This is a noteworthy statement. What Climacus is saying is that if a Christian acknowledges that he is a disciple and follower of some particular Christian teacher (Peter or Paul, Luther or Hegel, Mynster or Grundtvig), he thereby acknowledges that he is not a Christian at all. In effect, the policy drives (through a Socratic roundabout way) the unity of Christians: if each Christian relates to Christ as a single individual, then there will be only one congregation, only one Church. If this is indeed the policy of Climacus (and what Kierkegaard wrote in

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1273 See CUP, 567 / SV1 VII, 494.
1274 CUP, 573 / SV1 VII, 499.
1275 Incidentally, this was also the view of the apostle Paul himself; see 1 Cor 3:3–23.
Two Ages immediately after Postscript suggests that it is 1276, then his individualism turns out to actually be a radical cure against sectarian particularism.

The Socratic relationship between Christians also means that the communication between them must also be Socratic, i.e. indirect, inasmuch as it goes through the relationship to Christ that each of them has in his inwardness. 1277 Now, even if it were true that not all those who have been born and baptized in Christian countries actually have become Christians, the Socratic relationship and the Socratic communication still prevail in Christendom. Just as within the Socratic paradigm everyone must be assumed to possess the necessary knowledge in his soul, so in Christendom it is not the knowledge that is lacking among so-called Christians. All the information needed is there, the books and practices are there, hence the possibility to truly become Christian exists equally for all, 1278 and when it comes to judging actuality, to judging hearts, who is capable of doing that? 1279

However, there is an important passage in Postscript on the apostles that qualifies the Socratic equality with the result that the overall view of Climacus becomes a bit different from the one he presented in Philosophical Fragments. Once, writes Climacus, there existed this group of people who became Christians through a miracle and who thereupon turned their attention outward to converting others. 1280 These people, the apostles, paradoxically had a direct relation to God and to other people. Climacus writes:

An apostle’s direct relation to God is paradoxical-dialectical, for a direct relation is lower (the middle term is the religiousness of imma-

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1276 See TA, 106 / SV I, VIII, 99. We shall return to Two Ages and to the policy of “the single individual” in subdivision 8.2.
1279 CUP, 364 and 587 / SV I VII, 315 and 511.
1280 CUP, 605 / SV I VII, 527.
nence, Religiousness $A$) than the indirect relation of the congregation, since the indirect relation is between spirit and spirit and the direct relation is esthetic—and yet the direct relation is higher...—
The apostle’s direct relation to other people is paradoxical-dialectical, because this relation of the apostle’s life, turned outward and occupied with spreading Christianity in kingdoms and countries, is lower than the lay person’s indirect relation to others, which is based on his essentially having to deal with himself. The direct relation is an esthetic relation (oriented outward), and to that extent lower, and yet as exceptional it is higher for the apostle—this is the paradoxical-dialectical...The paradox is that the direct relation is higher for an apostle, but this is not the case for others.\footnote{1281}

In *Philosophical Fragments* Climacus did not recognize the possibility that some individuals could have a direct relation to the god. Here apostles are identified as such people and, which is noteworthy, they are set apart from “the congregation,” from “the layman.” The use of these words is significant as it suggests that the pastors, as carriers of the Apostolic Succession, might in the view of Climacus share the position and the paradoxical authority of apostles. As we noted above, Climacus maintains that “ordination is a teacher’s paradoxical transformation in time,” in which “the Christian nota bene” is again written alongside a historical event, and due to it the pastor has the authority to teach and preach.\footnote{1282}

Thus, within the Christian order of things, pastors seem to occupy an exceptional position by virtue of their office. But, ac-

\footnote{1281} \textit{CUP}, 605 n / \textit{SVI VII}, 527 n. \footnote{1282} \textit{CUP}, 273 / \textit{SVI VII}, 232. That Climacus might place pastors in this respect on a par with the apostles is suggested by a passage from a draft for *The Book on Adler*: “But perhaps some reader recalls that Magister Kierkegaard has always used the expression about himself \textit{qua} author that he is \textit{without authority} and used it so emphatically that it is repeated as a \textit{formula in every preface} [of his \textit{Upbuilding Discourses}]. Authority is a specific quality either of an apostolic calling or of ordination. To preach is precisely to use authority...” (\textit{BA}, 311–312 / \textit{Pap. VIII 2 B 9:17}.)
According to Climacus, the rest of us “poor individual human beings,” and also the pastor as a private person, have “only the task of existing as a Christian.”

When Climacus writes that “every human being must be assumed to possess essentially what belongs essentially to being a human being,” \textit{mutatis mutandis} the same applies to Christians. Essentially the individual Christian only has to deal with himself; to the other Christians he is only in an indirect relation. And just as to will to be an individual human being “with the help of and by virtue of one’s difference is flabbiness,” so it is flabbiness to want to claim to be an extraordinary good Christian, or a true Christian, and, thereby, to exclude the others from being true Christians, instead of just trying actually to exist as a Christian without making a fuss about it.

It is understandable, then, that Climacus also maintains that Christianity is \textit{hidden inwardness}. Christianity must be hidden inwardness because the inwardness of the spirit of an individual is never directly apparent from his actions. The actions just create a possibility for others to apprehend it, to believe in it. But Christianity tends to be hidden inwardness also because it prefers humble action in hiddenness for exclusive (\textit{fornem}) and directly visible solutions, such as entering the monastery or establishing a revivalist sect of true Christians. Incidentally, the view Climacus champions here could be derived from the New Testament. There should be no clamor and noise about one’s good deeds. The notion that scribes and Pharisees had, that they would be better believers than others, is presumptuous.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1283] See CUP, 605 / \textit{SV1} VII, 527–528.
\item[1284] CUP, 356 / \textit{SV1} VII, 309.
\item[1285] CUP, 605 n / \textit{SV1} VII, 527 n.
\item[1286] CUP, 356 / \textit{SV1} VII, 309.
\item[1287] CUP, 532 n.1 / \textit{SV1} VII, 464 n.1.
\end{footnotes}
But is not Climacus a bit unfair in that he stops his ears from what is justified in the *revivalist critique* of lip Christianity and established Christendom? But in fact he does not stop his ears from this critique. His *Postscript* is his version of the revivalist critique.\(^{1289}\) His critique of the objective approach to Christianity, his demand for inwardness and subjective appropriation, his emphasis on personal relationship to Christ all imply a tacit acknowledgement and personal appropriation of the critique. Moreover, Climacus does acknowledge the meaningfulness of the question, whether the present Church is still “the apostolic Church,” that is, “the same Church that has persisted for eighteen centuries.”\(^{1290}\) Despite all this, he appears to take the side of bishop Mynster against the Gruntvigians, against the “Anabaptist heresy,” and the like.\(^{1291}\) What could justify this?

The justification could lie in the idea that Constantin Constantius presented at the end of his book *Repetition*: that the exception that battles with the universal should at the same time work for the universal.\(^{1292}\) Despite his subjective approach, Climacus seems to *prefer universalism to particularism* and the unity of the Church to its dissolution into competing factions. Through his apparent ethical integrity bishop Mynster stood for unity. By developing the dangerous individualistic position into a pious form of Christianity, by subordinating and subduing the passionate inwardness thus under the established order, Kierkegaard might have thought to have done a favor for his “father’s priest.”

At the same time, however, he might have thought that his position saves that which was justified in the critique of formalized and spiritless Christianity. If the Bible and the Living Word

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1289 I owe this insight to a conversation with Christian Fink Tolstrup in Copenhagen 2002.
1291 *CUP*, 365 / *SV I* VII, 316.
1292 See *R*, 227 / *SV I* III, 261.
in the Church have authority, they have it paradoxically. They receive it from the individuals who have faith in the paradox, that is, in the god that reportedly established the office of the apostle and established, through the spirit that he sent to them, the apostolic Church and its practices. Since there is an obvious circle involved in this authorization (the authorization is based on the report handed down by those authorized), there is, of course, always room for individual subjects to doubt the holiness of Scripture and the Church. However, since these objects are now there in historical actuality and are the best available resource for faith, why would the subject not want to sanctify them and have piety towards them? The subject has to relate to them somehow, so why should he negate them with his criticism instead of referring them back to God? After all, as Magister Kierkegaard pointed out in his dissertation, it is better for the individual to acknowledge his relation to the definite given context, lest he should “become a word without meaning because it is wrenched out of its associations.”

And perhaps the Christian might also want to cherish the established Christianity, because he might not prefer to “hate his father and mother” and the established Christianity might provide an occasion, which he is unable to provide himself, for his father and mother and for others to receive faith?

This interpretation of the motives and position of Kierkegaard in *Postscript* is just a hypothesis, of course. However, what Kierkegaard writes in his epilogue for the book gives some support for the interpretation. In the end of the epilogue “A First and Last Explanation” Kierkegaard expresses, on his own behalf, gratitude for Governance, for his deceased father, and his father’s priest and, on behalf of his pseudonyms, respect for the established order and for what has been handed down from the fathers.

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1293 CI, 283 / SV I XIII, 354.
1294 Cf. CUP, 16 and 586 / SV I VII, 7 and 510.
Looking back on his authorship that, he thought at the time, had reached its end with *Postscript*, Kierkegaard writes on his own behalf:

First of all, I want to give thanks to Governance, who in such multitudinous ways has encouraged my endeavor, has encouraged it over four and one-quarter years without perhaps a single day’s interruption of effort, has granted me much more than I had ever expected...even if to others the accomplishment seems to be a complicated triviality. So, with fervent thanks to Governance, I do not find it unsettling that I cannot quite be said to have achieved anything or, what is of less importance, attained anything in the outer world.\(^{1295}\)

What Kierkegaard writes here expresses in an exemplary manner the ideal of living poetically. He testifies how Governance has educated him during the years he used all his capacity in fulfilling his personal calling. This is most important for him as it should be for every individual, and the achievements in the outer world are of secondary importance. However, his activity as an author has unfolded itself in the world and aimed to accomplish something there also. Thus, Governance has been bringing him up, while he has been fulfilling his task in the world.

Next, Kierkegaard expresses his gratitude to his father: “I want to call to mind, in recollecting gratitude, my deceased father, the man to whom I owe most of all, also with regard to my work.”\(^{1296}\) The gesture expresses the inward, personal relationship and simultaneously makes also the contemporary reader recollect the old Kierkegaard, who had formerly been “a clothing merchant here in the city.”\(^{1297}\) Thus, it conveys a sense of piety and a sense of personal and local history that underscores the concrete situatedness of his work as an author. In passing, Kierkegaard also recalls his

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\(^{1295}\) *CUP*, 628 / *SVI VII*, 547–548.

\(^{1296}\) *CUP*, 629 / *SVI VII*, 548.

\(^{1297}\) Cf., for example, *EUD*, 3 / *SVI III*, 9.
reader (presumably in the first place Regine Olsen) and the firm Kts, i.e. bishop Mynster.

Then Kierkegaard goes on to pay tribute to what is good in the established order. He writes on behalf of his pseudonyms:

Insofar as the pseudonymous authors might have affronted any respectable person in any way whatever, or perhaps even any man I admire, insofar as the pseudonymous authors in any way whatever might have disturbed or made ambiguous any actual good in the established order—then there is no one more willing to make an apology than I...

Kierkegaard continues by explaining that the possible importance of the pseudonymous authors

unconditionally does not consist in making any new proposal, some unheard-of discovery, or in founding a new party and wanting to go further, but precisely in the opposite, in wanting to have no importance, in wanting, at a remove that is the distance of double-reflection, once again to read through solo, if possible in a more inward way, the original text of individual human existence-relationships, the old familiar text handed down from the fathers.\(^\text{1298}\)

Here we have an expression of piety, first, towards what is actually good in the established order, presumably the political and the religious order alike. Second, we have a strange explanation of what the pseudonyms have wanted to do: they have wanted to read through solo “the original text of individual human existence-relationships [de individuelle, humane Existents-Forholds Urskrift]” handed down from the fathers. What is this “original text”? Is it the Bible, or is it our pre-structured existence? Or is it a combination of both? And how can there be a text of individual human existence-relationships? Would it not be paradoxical if there were a “general” truth that would capture the “individual”

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\(^{1298}\) CUP, 629–630 / SVI VII, 548–549.
existence-relationships? And how can an “original” text be “handed down from the fathers”? How can it be the original text, if it is a text molded and handed down by a long tradition? Is there not an obvious contradiction involved here?

My interpretation is that the text is the Bible in the light of which the pre-structured existence is interpreted. The paradox is precisely that the Christian truth that stands in the Bible reaches the level of individual existence and that it is the original and eternal truth, although it is handed to us in and through the historical tradition. The statement by Kierkegaard shows that he is fully aware of the paradoxes and contradictions involved.

Be the correct interpretation of that sentence as it may. At least it is clear on the basis of the statements which conclude Postscript and the whole pseudonymous authorship that Kierkegaard took into consideration that he and his pseudonyms work within a historical context and within a historical tradition. They testify also that Kierkegaard believed that this historical tradition contains the truth that is the truth for the single individual, the upbuilding “truth for you” that the priest from Jutland in the “Ultimatum” of Either/Or advised his reader to seek. The task of the individual, then, is personally to appropriate this traditional truth and to put it in practice.

Let us now try to sum up the results from our exegesis of Postscript. How does Climacus take into consideration the situatedness of the subject, and how does his view exemplify the ideal of living poetically, or, indeed, does it at all?

Climacus already takes the historical situation into consideration in assuming a subjective approach to the truth of Christianity. The subjective approach is in his view the corrective that the age of science and scholarship (Videnskab) and culture (Dannelse) needs. In 19th century Christendom, dominated as it was by objective reflection, it was about time to emphasize the subjective in-
wardness that pertains to Christian existence, to emphasize that the “decision is rooted in subjectivity.” This corrective to the aberrant tendency of the age does not mean that Climacus would bereave the manifestations of Christianity in the objective sphere of all significance. Despite the strong rhetoric against the objective approach to the truth of Christianity, Climacus does not deny that the Bible and the Church with its sacraments also make up a precondition for Christian inwardness. The point of Climacus is not that personal faith and the God-relationship would be completely independent of Holy Scripture and the sacraments. The point is that personal faith and the God-relationship have enlivened and should again enliven these manifestations of Christianity: the activity of the subject, even if it were only his right kind of passivity, is decisive for the proper use of these means of salvation, even if the spirit of God were their fundamental user. To this indispensable activity of the subject Climacus includes the whole ethical-religious development that leads to the leap from unbeliever to believer. As we have seen previously in chapters 2 and 4, this development, the development of the subject through the aesthetic and ethical-religious stages, likewise unfolds itself in the historical actuality, in which the subject always finds himself.

Awareness of the historical situation also informs Climacus’ view on the life that follows the qualitative transition from unbeliever to believer. According to Climacus, in Christendom the believer will stand in a Socratic relation to the other (would-be) Christians. He is not to turn outwards in a revivalist ecstasy and “run around and proclaim Christianity—in a Christian country.” Instead, he is to assume that those who consider and represent themselves as Christians are indeed Christians, and he is to remember that he is a sinner himself and to concentrate on the
humble task of “existing as a Christian,” whatever his place and role is in established Christendom. Neither Climacus nor Kierkegaard wants to disturb or make ambiguous “any actual good in the established order.” On the contrary, they just wish to enliven the given “human existence-relationships” with appropriate spiritual inwardness. Climacus maintains, furthermore, that as a single individual the believer is without authority. But by trying to actualize the Christian ideal in his own existence the individual may also indirectly communicate something pertaining to Christianity to his fellow beings. A layman Christian may keep to this humble task with good conscience, since there exists a group of people, the pastors, who have received a calling to communicate Christianity directly and with authority.

It is clear, then, that Climacus takes into consideration the situatedness of the subject in the historical and social actuality. But, in doing that, does he also hold to the ideal of living poetically?

First, we may note that Climacus does react to the real-life situation (the scene in the cemetery) and to the cultural-historical situation (the culture dominated by objective knowledge) like a character that participates himself in the drama. In accordance with the given situation he assumes his task and strategy in order to interfere with the actual and urgent matters of his times.

Second, we notice that Climacus does make room for elements that pertain to living poetically—for passion, for infinite interestedness, for risk and uncertainty—as he criticizes the objective approach to the Christian truth and the illusory certainty produced by Christian scholarship and culture. According to Climacus, in the objective, scholarly deliberation the individual loses “that infinite, personal, impassioned interestedness, which is the condition of faith, the ubique et nusquam [everywhere and nowhere] in

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1301 See CUP, 629–630 / SvI VII, 548–549.
which faith can come into existence.” While faith has its worst enemy in objective certainty, it has in fact “a beneficial taskmaster in uncertainty.” It is namely so that “whoever believes that there is a God and also a providence has an easier time (in preserving the faith), an easier time in definitely gaining the faith (and not an illusion) in an imperfect world, where passion is kept vigilant, than in an absolutely perfect world.” Consequently, it may be considered as fortunate that theology can never demonstrate objectively the reliability of the Bible, for instance.\footnote{1302}

Third, Climacus also has the notion pertaining to the ideal of living poetically that God brings the individual up in the Christian existence. According to Climacus, the Christian paradox brings the inwardness in an existing subject to its highest in the passion of faith corresponding to it.\footnote{1304} Thereby the individual “is situated in the extremity of existence.”\footnote{1305} Now he has no more the possibility of escaping, of withdrawing into the eternal that lies behind.\footnote{1306} If he believes in Christ, he can no longer revoke the whole of temporal existence by assuming a humorous attitude towards it.\footnote{1307} Neither can he regard his existence as an element in his eternal consciousness, like a person existing in the sphere of Religiosity A does. In compensation he has the prospect of becoming eternal in existence through a relation to the historical that stands outside him. For the Christian existing becomes higher than all thinking, since it is through existing that he, who was not eternal, may “become eternal” with the help of “the god in time.”\footnote{1308}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[1302]{CUP, 29 / SVI VII, 18–19.}
\footnotetext[1303]{CUP, 30 / SVI VII, 19.}
\footnotetext[1304]{CUP, 199 / SVI VII, 166.}
\footnotetext[1305]{CUP, 230 / SVI VII, 193.}
\footnotetext[1306]{CUP, 572 / SVI VII, 498–499.}
\footnotetext[1307]{See CUP, 602–603 / SVI VII, 524–525.}
\footnotetext[1308]{CUP, 573 / SVI VII, 499–500.}
\end{footnotes}
Fourth, the Christian existence is also characterized by the *imprudence and excess* that distinguishes the forms of living poetically from reasonable bourgeois and philosophical models of life. A reasonable person first forms with the help of his understanding and reason a clear conception of the nature of reality; then he acts, in a controlled way, in accordance with the conception. By contrast, Climacus claims that an existing human being cannot form a clear conception of the actuality of God: for him Christ remains the absolute paradox, the absurd. But all the same the Christian depends absolutely and holds fast “in the passion of inwardness” on this object of faith.¹³⁰⁹ Now, when it comes to this absolute, passionate relationship, the principle *ne quid nimis* [nothing in excess] does not apply. And when the god allows himself to be crucified for the sake of the human being, the least the human being may do in return is to venture everything, to stake everything for the sake of the god.¹³¹⁰ Thus, to be a believer is for Johannes Climacus, as it was for Johannes *de silentio*, not a prudent and reasonable affair, but an excessive and passionate affair, a form of divine madness.¹³¹¹

However, as Climacus already pointed out in *Philosophical Fragments*, having this passionate affair of faith does not mean that the believer would give up using his understanding.¹³¹² The “qualitative transition of the leap from unbeliever to believer”¹³¹³ is *not a leap into total irrationality*. The Christian respects the universally human and therefore he must use his understanding in his intercourse with others. He also uses his understanding in order to become aware of the incomprehensible and in order to relate him-

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¹³¹³ *CUP*, 12 / *SV I VII*, 3.
self to the incomprehensible as a believer. The Christian is keen on understanding all the possible objections that understanding has against paradoxes of Christianity, for then he may believe against his understanding. In that faith overcomes understanding, it thus remains in a dialectical relation to understanding and uses the contrast to understanding in determining itself as incomprehensible. According to Climacus, this disciplined, self-sacrificing work of understanding guarantees that the believer does not believe whatever nonsense, but only the incomprehensible that in a determinate and significant way transcends his understanding.\textsuperscript{1314} Climacus writes:

\begin{quote}
Dialectic in its truth is a kindly disposed, ministering power that discovers and helps to find where the absolute object of faith and worship is, where the absolute is—namely, there where in unknowing the difference between knowledge and nonknowledge collapses in absolute worship, there where the objective uncertainty resists in order to force the passionate certitude of faith, there where in absolute subjection the conflict about right and wrong collapses in absolute worship. Dialectic itself does not see the absolute, but it leads, as it were, the individual to it and says: Here it must be, that I can vouch for; if you worship here, you worship God.\textsuperscript{1315}
\end{quote}

In other words, faith has nothing against the disciplined dialectic; to the contrary, it needs its service, if it wants to go the road of human understanding to the end and to discover, what in a significant way surpasses human understanding.

Understanding and reflection must also be preserved because “to understand oneself in existence” belongs to Christian existence just as it belongs to ethical-religious existence in general. The difference is only that in Christian existence the self receives richer and “more profound qualifications that are even more difficult to

\textsuperscript{1314} \textit{CUP}, 567–568 / \textit{SV} VII, 495.

\textsuperscript{1315} \textit{CUP}, 490–491 / \textit{SV} VII, 426–427. (Translation slightly altered.)
understand together with existing.” A Christian understands his existence in the light of the paradoxes of sin and the god in time and, as was described above, to exist and to understand one’s existence through the consciousness of these two is a difficult task.\textsuperscript{1316} It is troublesome to exist in contradictions, to exist with consciousness of sin, with the constant possibility of become offended, and with pain of sympathy.

But if Christian existence is as troublesome and as full of suffering as Climacus lets us believe in \textit{Postscript}, it becomes hard to see what could motivate a human individual to hold onto it. Even if Christian existence is not based on knowledge and calculations of understanding and reason, there should be something in it that attracts the human spirit, should there not?

In \textit{The Concept of Irony} Kierkegaard claimed that only if the person lives poetically in the religious way is he able to reach “the highest enjoyment, the true bliss in which the subject is not dreaming but possesses himself in infinite clarity.”\textsuperscript{1317} In \textit{Philosophical Fragments} Climacus calls faith as a “happy passion” and lets his reader understand that, if only the individual has faith, he will be happy (lykkelig).\textsuperscript{1318} What happens to these positive aspects of Christian existence in \textit{Postscript}? Is there anything left of them? Or does Christian existence now amount only to high-minded striving and endless suffering?

In \textit{Postscript} Climacus does his best to again make Christian existence the highest and most demanding task that a human being may assume. This, perhaps, explains why the possible aspects of faith tend to disappear from his sight. However, Climacus does state what might make someone have a passionate interest for Christianity and to strive to exist as a Christian. That is, of course, the desire for “an eternal happiness” (en evig Salighed) that a hu-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{CII}, 298 / \textit{SV} XIII, 367.
\item \textit{PF}, 54 and 59 / \textit{SV} IV, 220–221 and 224.
\end{itemize}
man individual may have. The personal quest for this “highest good” is the directly stated motive for the whole subjective approach to Christianity. Christianity promises to the individual this good and faith anticipates it so that through faith the individual is already able to participate in it here in temporality. But since, according to Climacus, “all idealizing passion is an anticipation of the eternal in existence,” why would the individual end up choosing to exist on the basis of the Christian passion of faith in particular? Climacus’ answer seems to be his theory of the stages of existence as a whole. “In the fullness of time,” after having passed the ethical-religious development, the individual will have “decisive use for Christianity.”

Indirectly Climacus also indicates other positive aspects of Christian existence. Besides the prospect of becoming eternal in time and attaining an eternal happiness, there is the free and close relationship to God, indeed, the absolute relation to God who has come into time. Besides this relationship, which is certainly positive for the one that loves and adores God, there is the strength that this relation gives, the strength to face the darkest sides of human existence including its apparent end in death. Moreover, as was already anticipated in chapter 5, Christianity gives back to the temporal existence the meaning that Religiousness and humor had taken away from it: a Christian may con-

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1319 See CUP, 15–16 / SV1 VII, 7.
1320 See CUP, 590–591 / SV1 VII, 514.
1321 That Climacus sees such a relationship as an important characteristic of Christian existence is indicated indirectly in CUP, 604 / SV1 VII, 526, where he criticizes the “pusillanimous Bible interpretation”: “[I]t is not a close relation between God and a human being if they are so distant from each other that there is place and use for all this worried subtlety and pondering of a despondent submissiveness.”
1322 See CUP, 588 / SV1 VII, 512: “Christianity is a glorious life-view in which to die, the only true comfort, and the moment of death is Christianity’s situation.”
sider his temporal existence as significant for his upbringing, he may live forward and let himself be poetically composed in time. In fact he must, since after God has made his appearance in the historical actuality, the exit through the backward movement of recollection is not an option for him anymore.

Hence, despite the somewhat oppressive rhetoric that Climacus uses, positive motives are there, too.
In this chapter we shall investigate how the ideal of living poetically makes itself present in the Christian authorship following *Postscript*. We shall concentrate on the works by Anti-Climacus, who in the authorship serves as a counterpart and corrective to Climacus.\(^\text{1323}\) In *Practice in Christianity* (*Indøvelse i Christendom*, 1850) the situatedness of Christian existence is considered most explicitly. Here the pseudonym Anti-Climacus sets the Christian existence dramatically into its historical and social context, and outlines how the Christian is brought up in the given actuality. The reader receives a compelling view on what it is to follow Christ and to practice Christianity in the given historical actuality. But before we enter *Practice in Christianity*, we shall examine *The Sickness unto Death* (*Sygdommen til Døden*, 1849). In this work, as in *Postscript*, the focus is on the inwardness of the human being, on how the self relates to itself. We shall investigate if what Anti-Climacus writes in this psychological treatise is also compatible with the ideal of living poetically and the idea that the Christian is situated in the historical and social world.\(^\text{1324}\)

\(^{1323}\) On the relationship between Climacus and Anti-Climacus, see *PC*, 279–283 / Pap. X I A 510, p. 329; X I A 517, 530, 536; and X 6 B 48.

\(^{1324}\) *The Sickness unto Death* would perhaps not have been included in this exegesis of the situational aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought, had it not been given a central position in Kierkegaard’s authorship in recent works by Michael Theunissen and Arne Grøn (see Theunissen 1981 and 2005; Grøn 1997). Grøn even claims that *The Sickness unto Death* would be Kierkegaard’s philosophical and theological main work (Grøn 1997, 13). The problem is that although both Theunissen and Grøn have recognized that Kierkegaard takes into
7.1 Through Despair and Offense

_The Sickness unto Death_ is not a psychological treatise in the modern sense of the word. Its subtitle is “A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening.” Like _The Concept of Anxiety_, then, it is a treatise in “dogmatic psychology” that considers psychological phenomena from an ethical-religious perspective. In contrast to the earlier work, however, _The Sickness unto Death_ directly aims at “upbuilding and awakening” and, in accordance with this purpose, he uses an authoritative tone of voice.\(^{1325}\)

_The Sickness unto Death_ has as its topic the phenomenon of despair, which it diagnoses as a sickness of spirit: as a disturbance of human spiritual life caused by sin. According to Anti-Climacus, “a human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity.” In relating itself to itself the human spirit should relate these constituents to each other in the right way. Despair (Fortvivlelse) signifies that there is a misrelation in the spiritual synthesis. Because the human spirit is “a derived” relation established by another, ultimately despair signifies a misrelation to the power that has established the human spirit.\(^{1326}\) In other words, fundamentally, despair is sin.\(^{1327}\)

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\(^{1325}\) Compare the tones of voice in the prefaces of the respective works, in _CA_, 7–8 / _SV1_ IV, 279–280 and in _SUD_, 5–6 / _SV1_ XI, 117–118.

\(^{1326}\) _SUD_, 13–14 / _SV1_ XI, 127–128.
Consequently, despair is completely rooted out only through faith, which Anti-Climacus defines as the “state” of the self when “in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self is grounded [grunder] transparently in the power that established it.” While the definition defines faith as a state, it also states that the state subsists through a constant relating. Anti-Climacus writes that faith is “the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out.” But he adds that “if a person is truly not to be in despair, he must at every moment destroy the possibility [of despair].” In other words, to avoid the misrelation of despair the human spirit must base its existence in God constantly and continuously. The reason for this is the fact that was already suggested in *The Concept of Anxiety* and in *Philosophical Fragments* and that was emphasized by Climacus in *Postscript*: as existing the spirit is in a constant process of becoming. Anti-Climacus confirms this as he writes that “every moment that a self exists, it is in a process of becoming.” Let us now investigate his view on this process of becoming and see whether it accords with the ideal of living poetically.

### 7.1.1 The Poetical Equilibrium

According to Anti-Climacus, the task of the spirit or of “the self” is “to become itself.” The self is to become itself and this means that it shall bring together in its existence the contrasting con-

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1327 *SUD*, 75 and 81 / *SVI XI*, 187 and 193.
1329 *SUD*, 14–15 / *SVI XI*, 129.
1330 *SUD*, 30 / *SVI XI*, 143.
stituents of its synthesis. As Anti-Climacus puts it, the self is “to become concrete.”

To become concrete involves first of all a synthesis of infinitude and finitude, which the self shall realize through a double movement: through “an infinite moving away from itself in the infinitizing of the self, and an infinite coming back to itself in the finitizing process.” This infinite movement in its turn involves imagination (Phantasien), since imagination is “the medium of infinitization” (det Uendeliggjørendes Medium). However, imagination may lead a human being astray into the infinite, so that the person is led away from himself without ever coming back to himself. Anti-Climacus terms this phenomenon “infinitude’s despair.” In cases of infinitude’s despair, the person’s feeling, knowing, and willing become fantastic. Feeling becomes abstract sentimentality that inhumanly participates in the fate of abstractions, for example, that of “humanity in abstracto.” Knowing becomes inhuman knowledge without corresponding self-knowledge. Willing does not become “proportionately as concrete as it is abstract,” so that it would be simultaneously infinite in purpose and “personally present...in the small part of the task that can be carried out at once.”

But what is the antidote for becoming fantastic? It is not the abandonment of the infinite dimension of imagination, the despairing confinement and narrowness that Anti-Climacus terms “finitude’s despair.” In cases of finitude’s despair, the person apes “the others,” becomes “a mass man,” and while he is able to go along in business and social life just as well as anyone else, he does not become himself, but is “tricked out of his self” and forgets himself. According to Anti-Climacus, the self can become itself

1331 SUD, 29–30 / SVI XI, 143.
1332 SUD, 30 / SVI XI, 143.
1333 SUD, 30–32 / SVI XI, 144–145.
through a personal relationship to God. In other words, imagination, feeling, knowing, and willing are all essential in healthy existence based on faith; they just are directed, through the relation that the individual has to God, back to the concrete actuality at hand so that the self relates simultaneously to the infinitude and finitude. If this is the case, then the self “is grounded transparently in the power that has established it,” while he lives his life in finitude.

Similarly, in the life of the self, there must be both “possibility” through imagination and faith and “necessity” through obedience. If the person lacks imagination, or, rather, gives up his imagination, he may fall into spiritless philistine-bourgeois existence. Anti-Climacus describes:

Berief of imagination, as the philistine-bourgeois always is, whether alehouse keeper or prime minister, he lives within a certain trivial compendium of experiences as to how things go, what is possible, what usually happens. In this way, the philistine-bourgeois has lost his self and God. In order for a person to become aware of his self and of God, imagination must raise him higher than the miasma of probability, it must tear him out of this and teach him to hope and to fear—or to fear and to hope—by rendering possible that which surpasses the quantum satis [sufficient amount] of any experience. But the philistine-bourgeois mentality does not have imagination, does not want to have it, abhors it.

Because the philistine-bourgeois lacks imagination and a personal relationship to God, he actually exists in despair, claims Anti-Climacus. If something terrible happens to the philistine-

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1335 SUD, 29–30 / SVI XI, 143.
1336 Cf. the definition of faith in SUD, 14, 49, and 131 / SVI XI, 128, 160, and 241. (Translation here slightly altered.)
1337 Cf. SUD, 101–102 / SVI XI, 212.
1338 SUD, 41 / SVI XI, 153–154. (Translation slightly altered.)
bourgeois, he will despair, which shows that fundamentally he was in despair all the time.\textsuperscript{1339} If, however, the person has imagination and, on top of that, faith, he will not fall into despair. Even in the middle of the worst misfortunes that earthly life can offer, he will still be able “to breathe” in as much as he believes that “for God everything is possible at every moment.” This, writes Anti-Climacus, is “the good health of faith that resolves contradictions.” The believer has hope in the possibility of help “by virtue of the absurd” that for God everything is possible. He leaves it to God how he is to be helped, but he believes that help will come “unexpectedly, miraculously, divinely.” In this way he becomes “a nothing in the hand of the ‘Helper’ for whom all things are possible.”\textsuperscript{1340} But the self “is grounded transparently in the power that has established it,”\textsuperscript{1341} only if it also has necessity, that is, only if it obeys God and through obedience submits to the necessity in its life. If the self runs away from itself in possibility without holding on to necessity, it becomes just an abstract possibility that “flounders in possibility” without historical continuity and everything becomes more and more momentary for it, claims Anti-Climacus.\textsuperscript{1342} Hence, in order to avoid “necessity’s despair,” the self needs possibility, and in order to avoid “possibility’s despair,” the self needs necessity.

The above preliminary view that Anti-Climacus gives of what it is to exist in faith coincides completely with the ideal of living poetically that Magister Kierkegaard outlined in \textit{The Concept of Irony}. There, too, the ideal was outlined by a double movement that negated, first, the spiritless philistine-bourgeois existence that

\textsuperscript{1339} \textit{SUD}, 41 / \textit{SVI} XI, 154, together with \textit{SUD}, 24 / \textit{SVI} XI, 138.

\textsuperscript{1340} \textit{SUD}, 38–40 and 71 / \textit{SVI} XI, 151–152 and 182.

\textsuperscript{1341} Cf. the definition of faith in \textit{SUD}, 14, 49, and 131 / \textit{SVI} XI, 128, 160, and 241. (Translation slightly altered).

\textsuperscript{1342} \textit{SUD}, 35–37 / \textit{SVI} XI, 148–150.
becomes “fossilized in finite social forms,” and second, the immersion in infinite possibilities typical to irony. According to the view shared by both authors, the poetical elements of imagination, feeling, infinitude and possibility are to be part of everyday existence, but they must be balanced by ethical-religious will or obedience that makes the self focus on his personal tasks that form the backbone of his existence. As Climacus would put it in Postscript, the “art of existence” is to relate to both poles of existence in the right way, namely, to relate to them in accordance with the “how” of faith.

7.1.2 The Immanent Development in Relation to Its Context

Let us then examine how the historical and social aspects of existence come into picture in The Sickness unto Death. The history that comes to the fore in a psychological treatise is, naturally, the history of the individual spirit. However, in this and the following subdivisions I try to present evidence that Anti-Climacus situates this development in a larger context in accordance with the ideal of living poetically.

In The Sickness unto Death a negative development of the human spirit through stages of despair is delineated that complements the positive developments delineated in The Concept of Irony, Either/Or, and Postscript, and parallels the negative development delineated in The Concept of Anxiety. At the same time, the dialectical movement that leads the subject from immediate existence to more and more transparent self-consciousness is here developed more rigorously. Anti-Climacus maps out with scientific formality a progress of human spirit in which every step signi-

\textsuperscript{1343} Cf. Cl, 303 / SV1 XIII, 371.

The dialectic of the development resembles Hegel’s dialectic: the development goes through contradictions and sublations towards self-consciousness.\footnote{On the resemblance and differences between the two, see Gron 1997, 137–142, and Stewart 2001, 572–587.} But as in the other pseudonymous works here, too, the dialectical movement that takes place is an existential one: the transitions are not necessitated by the dynamics inherent to the concepts itself—they are “pathos-filled” (motivated by pathos such as despair and faith)\footnote{On the distinction between “dialectical” and “pathos-filled” (pathetiske) transitions, see JP 1, 808; JP 3, 2338–2339, 2345, and 2353; JP 4, 4634; JP 5, 5977 / Pap. IV C 11–12 and 105, V C 1, VI A 33, VIII 2 C 1, and X 1 A 416. The distinction is between necessary transitions in the sphere of logic and abstract thought, and pathos-filled transitions in the sphere of spirit and freedom. In Concluding Unscientific Postscript Climacus seems to operate with a distinction between “passion” (Lidenskab) and “pathos” (Pathos): with the latter he refers specifically to the passions pertaining to religious suffering and guilt. Without causing harm to Kierkegaard’s intentions, I believe we could also hold anxiety and despair as forms of “pathos” and call the transitions motivated by and performed under these “pathé” as “pathos-filled.”} and voluntary (determined by free will and choice). Anti-Climacus maintains that “in all darkness and ignorance” there is a dialectical interplay between knowing and willing.\footnote{SUD, 48 / SV1 XI, 160.} Thus, for example, sin as a state of untruth and ignorance is rooted in willing, in defiance.\footnote{SUD, 93 / SV1 XI, 203.} But as it is with sin, so it is with faith: faith, too, implies a will to be oneself.
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and a will to transparency. Both the road to sin and untruth and the road to faith and truth depend, thus, on the quality of willing. This also means that the development is not necessary in any sense of the word. The development is not logically necessary and neither is it inevitable in the way processes of nature are. Anti-Climacus agrees with Judge William that the history of the individual spirit does not resemble the organic development of a plant. He writes:

As a matter of fact, from a spiritual point of view, a man does not arrive at anything as a matter of course over the years; this concept is precisely the uttermost opposite of spirit. On the contrary, it is very easy to leave something behind as a matter of course over the years. And over the years, an individual may abandon the little bit of passion, feeling, imagination, the little bit of inwardness he had and embrace as a matter of course an understanding of life in terms of trivialities (for such things come as a matter of course).

This statement of Anti-Climacus is in agreement with the view shared by Judge William and Johannes Climacus: in order to live poetically and to develop spiritually the individual must strive actively. On the other hand, Anti-Climacus maintains that “no one is born devoid of spirit,” so that if one becomes in life completely spiritless and completely immersed in triviality by aping “the others,” one has only oneself to blame.

However, by this Anti-Climacus does not want to deny that spiritlessness is a phenomenon of time that goes beyond the boundaries of the individual subject and characterizes his historical and social context as a whole. Anti-Climacus writes: “Nevertheless, it has to be said, and as frankly as possible, that so-called Christendom...is not merely a shabby edition of the essentially

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1350 See the definition of faith quoted above.
1352 SUD, 101–102 / SV1 XI, 212.
Christian, full of printer’s errors that distort the meaning and of thoughtless omissions and admixtures, but an abuse of it in having taken Christianity in vain.” Anti-Climacus complains that the personal ethical-religious demand that belongs to Christianity is no longer voiced in Christendom. There is no preaching of Christianity, only learned and personally disinterested reasoning on its truth. Actually Christendom has fallen far away from Christianity. The state of Christendom is now “despair of forgiveness of sins.” But this despair does not become manifest, because in the enlightened age the crowd has become a surrogate of the God-man and the presence of the crowd gives the individual illusory security that soothes despair. Nevertheless, the spiritless sense of security typical to the enlightened age is itself a form of despair, since it is a false escape from despair and therefore despair lies constantly beneath it. Anti-Climacus writes that if despair is not completely eradicated in that the self is grounded transparently in God through faith, then the person does not become aware that “he himself, his self, exists before this God,” but “vaguely rests in and merges in some abstract universality (state, nation, etc.).” But this means that he exists in despair. In other words, spiritlessness, i.e. the form of paganism prevalent in Christendom, is also despair although it is ignorant of being that. Therefore it must be regarded as an advantage for an individual if he becomes isolated from the dead body of humanity through falling personally in despair, since that may lead into faith—even if it may also lead into sin as a self-chosen and impenitent position.

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1353. *SUD*, 102 / *SVI* XI, 212. (Translation slightly altered.)
1357. The view that despair may be “a cure,” if it becomes a moment in faith (see *SUD*, 6 and 116 n / *SVI* XI, 118 and 226 n), is parallel with the view of Vigilius.
We shall now have a closer look at the development through the stages of despair that leads the individual to the situation, in which he is bound to make a conscious choice between faith and sin. We shall keep an eye especially on how the account of Anti-Climacus relates to the accounts given in the pseudonymous texts that we have studied previously.

The first stage of despair, despair over something earthly, goes together with immediate existence. Anti-Climacus writes: “The man of immediacy is only psychically qualified (insofar as there really can be immediacy without any reflection at all); his self, he himself, is an accompanying something within the dimensions of temporality and worldliness [Verdsligheden], in immediate connection with ‘the other’ (to heteron)...” The man of immediacy is at one with his context without a bend for genuine self-reflection and ethical self-determination. The dialectic of his existence is between “the pleasant and the unpleasant” and the categories through which he understands his existence are “good luck, bad luck, fate.” The characterization of the immediate existence is in all essentials the same as the characterizations we have found in the previous pseudonymous works, and also in harmony with these works is the view that immediate existence is fundamentally despair. Judge William noted in Either/Or that in aes-
thetic existence having meaning in life depends on the presence of some immediate condition. If the condition is lacking, the person despairs, but this just means that essentially his life had been despair all the time.\textsuperscript{1361} Anti-Climacus goes along with this. If some accident happens to the immediate self, if something strikes upon the self and it loses that earthly basis on which it builds its happiness, the self despairs.\textsuperscript{1362}

In the life of an individual "despair over something earthly" may lead to various different movement and states.\textsuperscript{1363} What interests us here is where despair should lead, if there is to be development in his spiritual life or, in the language of Judge William, if the self is to "gain a history."\textsuperscript{1364} Here, again, Anti-Climacus goes along with the judge. He writes about the need for \textit{ethical reflection}, through which the individual is able to make "a total break with immediacy" and win the consciousness of "the infinite self" that is needed in taking responsibility for the actual self.\textsuperscript{1365} This resembles the description of the ethical choice of oneself in \textit{Either/Or} and, as in that work, here, too, such an ethical conversion involves radical despair and repentance. Anti-Climacus writes that "if a person really does develop over the years, if he matures in an essential consciousness of the self, then he may despair in a higher form."\textsuperscript{1366} This is the \textit{despair over the earthly} in its totality that requires the activity of imagination, passion, and thought in order to arise at all. Anti-Climacus writes:

When the self in imagination despairs with infinite passion over something of this world, its infinite passion changes this particular thing, this something, into the world \textit{in toto}; that is, the category of

\textsuperscript{1362} SUD, 51 / SVI XI, 163–164.
\textsuperscript{1363} See SUD, 52–59 / SVI XI, 165–171.
\textsuperscript{1365} SUD, 54–55 / SVI XI, 167.
\textsuperscript{1366} SUD, 59 / SVI XI, 171.
totality inheres in and belongs to the despairing person. The earthly and the temporal as such consist precisely of particular things, and some particular thing may be regarded as the whole. The loss or deprivation of every earthly thing is actually impossible, for the category of totality is a thought category. Consequently, the self infinitely magnifies the actual loss and then despairs over the earthly \textit{in toto}.\footnote{SUD, 60 / SVI XI, 172.}

Such radical, impassioned despair is, according to Anti-Climacus, part of the genuine repentance through which “the life of the spirit can break through from the ground upwards.” The despair effects a metamorphosis, in which “consciousness of the eternal in the self breaks through, so that the battle can begin that either intensifies the despair in a still higher form or leads to faith.”\footnote{SUD, 59–60 / SVI XI, 171–172.}

It is worth noticing how the description by Anti-Climacus partly harmonizes, partly complements, but also partly differs from the account given by Judge William. The combination of ethical reflection, despair, and repentance is common to both, and so is the vision of the infinite and eternal self breaking through in them and taking responsibility for the actual, concrete self. Here Anti-Climacus harmonizes with Judge William’s account. In explicating the role of imagination and infinite passion in the metamorphosis, Anti-Climacus complements the account in an important way. He makes clear that imagination and passion are the capacities through which the human spirit is able to universalize the particular things of the temporal and earthly life. Imagination and passion change these particular things “into the world \textit{in toto}.” In other words, it is through these poetic capacities that the individual is able to form the “totality-view” or “life-view” that figures in Kierkegaard’s early writings and that according to their authors forms a necessary condition for leading an ethical-religious life in the historical world. Here would, then, be an additional reason for
Magister Kierkegaard and for us to call such an ethical-religious life “living poetically.”

However, the account by Anti-Climacus also differs from that by Judge William. In it the ethical conversion and repentance do not lead the individual all the way back to God, but mark only a beginning of the battle “that either intensifies the despair in a still higher form or leads to faith.”1369 Accordingly, “despair over the earthly” is not followed by a victorious realization of the ethical will of the individual himself, as it was in Either/Or, Part II. Instead, what follows is despair over oneself, that is, despair over one’s weakness. This different turn in the development is, in fact, in accordance with the critique that Johannes Climacus directed in Postscript at the victorious movement in Either/Or that uno tenore (without interruption) and without any help from the outside led the individual to find his ethical self.1370 Anti-Climacus apparently agrees with that critique by Climacus. He maintains that “the self must be broken in order to become itself.”1371 His idea is that one must first despair over one’s weakness and humble oneself under it, and then seek help from God and definitely turn away from despair to faith.1372 The ideal road out of despair now goes clearly via Christian faith.

It may be, however, that the self does not want to acknowledge itself and humbly seek help after having discovered its weakness, but becomes “inclosed” (Indesluttet) and instead keeps despairing over its weakness.1373 This is a truly perilous development in the sickness of despair, for in the “inclosed reserve” (Indesluttethed) despair may then go through metamorphoses that take the subject

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1371 SUD, 65 / SVI XI, 177.
1372 SUD, 61 / SVI XI, 173.
further away from salvation. Despair over oneself may turn into defiance and, still further, into demonic defiance.

When it comes to the relation to the given actuality, defiance bears a close resemblance to the position of Romantic irony as characterized in *The Concept of Irony*. Just like the ironist, a defiant person is conscious of his “infinite self” but only “in its most abstract form,” and with the help of this abstract form of self he wants to “compose” (construere) his self freely. Anti-Climacus writes:

> With the help of this infinite form, the self in despair wants to be master of itself or to create itself...to determine what he will have or not have in his concrete self. His concrete self...certainly has necessity and limitations, is this very specific being with these natural capacities, predispositions, etc. in this specific concretion of relations etc. But with the help of the infinite form, the negative self, he wants first of all to take upon himself the transformation of all this in order to fashion out of it a self such as he wants...[H]e does not want to put on his own self, does not want to see his given self as his task—he himself wants to compose his self by means of being the infinite form.

In the ethical-religious ideal of living poetically that was outlined in *The Concept of Irony* and then developed in *Either/Or*, Part II, the self took the given actuality as a gift and through obedience to God sought its place in the given social and historical actuality. As opposed to this, in irony the specific concretion of relations was negated and there was no obedience to a higher power. In irony nothing was taken as given and nothing stood fixed. Defiance, as described in *The Sickness unto Death*, takes a similar stance towards given actuality. As with irony, “the basis of the whole thing is nothing,” and the self can at any moment “arbitrarily dissolve...

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1374 *SUD*, 68 / *SVI* XI, 179.
the whole thing into nothing.” The self removes God from leadership, recognizes no power over itself, and without true earnestness relates itself to itself by way of “imaginary constructions” (experimenterende). Whatever the result of this defiant project is, it is not “self”: the self does not become itself. The ideal indirectly present that forms the basis of criticism here seems to the ethical-religious ideal of living poetically. One should not try to poetically compose oneself (at digte sig selv) and one’s surroundings, but let oneself be poetically composed (at lade sig digte) within the “specific concretion of relations” in which one already finds oneself.

Anti-Climacus writes that if in trying to master his concrete self with his infinite self the defiant person encounters in himself some basic difficulty, a “thorn in the flesh” that he can neither overcome nor ignore, the result of his project turns out to be demonic defiance. It is as if Judge William’s choice of oneself got jammed. The self makes the movement of infinite abstraction and tries then to appropriate his concrete self, but he meets with some basic defect that ruins his project. Now, instead of humbling himself in face of this concretion, instead of letting himself “be comforted by and healed by the eternal,” instead of becoming nothing in the hand of God and putting his hope in the absurd that “for God everything is possible,” the person becomes demonic. In The Concept of Anxiety, “the demonic” was diagnosed as “anxiety about the good.” In anxiety the demonic person turned down the good offered to him: the restoration of freedom through redemption and salvation. Similarly here the demonic is desperate defiance of the good and resistance against salvation. In hatred toward

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1375 SUD, 69–70 / SV1 XI, 181.
1376 SUD, 68–69 / SV1 XI, 180.
1377 SUD, 70–71 / SV1 XI, 181–182.
1378 See CA, 119 / SV1 IV, 387.
existence the demonic person wills to be himself in accordance with his misery.\textsuperscript{1379}

\textbf{7.1.3 The Possibility of Offense and the Actuality of Sin}

In the development of despair described in \textit{The Sickness Unto Death}, only now do we reach the point at which it becomes manifest that both despair over one’s weakness and despair in defiance are actually \textit{sin} (Part Two of the work). Although Anti-Climacus nowhere states this explicitly, it is clear on the basis of his statements that the event, which makes it manifest that despair is sin, is the encounter with God in time. In this respect, too, he seems to be in harmony with Vigilius Haufniensis and Johannes Climacus.

Certain passages referred to above have already suggested that the historical context already plays a role in the immanent development of despair. First, the need for earnest despair was said to be due to the spiritlessness of the age and due to the fact that “the man of immediacy” is fully immersed in temporality and worldliness. Second, in “despair over the earthly” imagination comes to despair with infinite passion over the world in totality, “over the earthly \textit{in toto}.” Third, it is said that in the higher forms of despair the aggravating factor is the “inclosed reserve,” in which the individual cuts himself away from the “specific concretion of relations,” and refuses to be composed through them in accordance with the will of God. All this suggests that the historical actuality already qualifies the immanent development of despair. Now, as something historical outside the immanent sphere of the subject comes to have a decisive effect on despair, the significance of the historical actuality becomes indisputable. It is clear that from this point onwards the psychological development is essentially conditioned by a certain historical event, the life of Christ. And in har-

\textsuperscript{1379} \textit{SUD}, 73–74 / \textit{SV} I XI, 184.
mony with the ethical-religious ideal of living poetically, Anti-Climacus makes it an earnest obligation for the individual to take a stand on this historical event and to react to it either in one way or another, either in faith or in offense. He writes that when God lets himself be born and become man, this fact is “the earnestness of existence” and everyone shall have opinion about it.\textsuperscript{1380}

In and through Christ, salvation and reconciliation is offered for the individual.\textsuperscript{1381} At the same time, the individual comes to stand “face to face with” or “directly before” (\textit{lige over for}) God. With Christ as his criterion (\textit{Maalestok}), he now gets a clear conception, not only of God, but also of himself: of what he should be, but what he is not and what, as a sinner, he does not even want to be.\textsuperscript{1382} And yet, despite his sin, he is invited “to live on the most intimate terms with God” and God almost implores him “to accept the help that is offered to him!”\textsuperscript{1383} In this situation the individual has two possibilities. Either he accepts the new covenant with humble courage and adoration (\textit{Tilbedelse}), or in his narrow-mindedness (\textit{Snæverhjertetbed}) he becomes offended. In the first alternative he attains the state of faith in which despair is completely rooted out. In the second alternative he despairs, now with consciousness of existing “before God”, and this qualification “before God,” turns his guilt (his despair in weakness or in defiance) into sin.\textsuperscript{1384}

Let us study the second alternative first. Why would the individual remain in despair and why would he even be offended, when divine help is being offered to him? According to Anti-Climacus, the possibility of offense lies, first of all, precisely in that God cares for the sin of the single individual and urges him to

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{1380} \textit{SUD}, 130 / \textit{SVI} XI, 239–240.
\item\textsuperscript{1381} \textit{SUD}, 113–114 / \textit{SVI} XI, 223–224.
\item\textsuperscript{1382} \textit{SUD}, 79–80 / \textit{SVI} XI, 191–192.
\item\textsuperscript{1383} \textit{SUD}, 85 / \textit{SVI} XI, 197.
\item\textsuperscript{1384} \textit{SUD}, 80–82 / \textit{SVI} XI, 192–194.
\end{footnotes}
accept his help. The possibility of offense lies namely in the idea that “a human being should have this reality [Realitet]: that as an individual human being a person is directly before God and consequently, as a corollary, that a person’s sin should be of concern to God.”¹³⁸⁵ This idea is ridiculous, absurd to the human understanding: why would the eternal, blessed, self-sufficient God care for the single individual and his sin? What concern would that be for a being like God? According to Anti-Climacus, Christianity is too high for the human being, since “it wants to make man into something so extraordinary that he cannot grasp the thought.”¹³⁸⁶ Consequently, human understanding prefers to stick to the “golden” mean, to the “ne quid nimis” (nothing in excess) of human wisdom. It turns down as absurd the purported divine offer and refuses to surrender itself to passionate adoration, to faith.¹³⁸⁷

This motive for offense, that Christianity makes the individual into something extraordinary, is approached from another angle in Practice in Christianity, Part II, which has offense as its topic. There it is the individualism of Christ himself, his defiance of and collision with “the established order” (det Bestaaende), that is shown to be offending to the natural human understanding. As a single individual Christ comes into collision with the established ethical-religious order of his time. Should such individualism be considered as justified? In Practice in Christianity Anti-Climacus answers in the affirmative. He argues that it is not the individual that obeys God, but the established order that deifies itself that is in the wrong. In fact, it is not the single individual that revolts against God in that he refuses to respect the established order; it is the established order that is in perpetual revolt against God in idolizing the principle “ne quid nimis;” in searching “total peace

¹³⁸⁵ SUD, 83 / SVI XI, 194–195.
¹³⁸⁶ SUD, 83 / SVI XI, 195.
and security,” and in forgetting its origin and fundamental justification in “the single individual’s relationship with God.” Against this tendency of established order Anti-Climacus maintains that the individual’s God-relationship shall keep “every established order in suspense (svævende)” — the Socratic “gadfly” shall spread “fear and trembling” within the collective of human beings.\footnote{PC, 85–91 / SV1 XII, 81–87.}

This Socratic-Christian ethical stance that Anti-Climacus explicates in Practice in Christianity brings out the justification for “the teleological suspension of the ethical,” the justification which was passed in silence in Fear and Trembling.\footnote{Cf. FT, 54–67 / SV1 III, 104–116.} It harmonizes with the ethical stance that Anti-Climacus presents in The Sickness unto Death. There he writes that the idea of existing “before God” that lies at the root of the antithesis of sin and faith “Christianly reshapes all ethical concepts and gives them one additional range.”\footnote{SUD, 83 / SV1 XI, 194–195.}

From the Christian point of view, claims Anti-Climacus, it is wrong to prioritize the universal over the individual. He writes that the Hegelian idea of “the predominance of the generation over the individual” is in fact a pagan, pantheistic idea. In the light of Christianity, God maintains order in existence by making every human being into an individual human being and by not permitting men to run together in the crowd (\textit{Mængden}).\footnote{SUD, 117–118 / SV1 XI, 227–228.}

According to Anti-Climacus, the Christian category of sin is “the category of individuality”: you and I are sinners. The “earnestness of sin” is its actuality in the single individual and this actuality cannot ultimately even be thought. Thus, Christian ethics “does not abstract from actuality but immerses itself in actuality” by operating with the category of individuality.\footnote{SUD, 119–120 / SV1 XI, 228–229.} Anti-Climacus does not deny the existence of hereditary sin, but he claims that
the teaching of the sin of the race has been misused. Although common to all, sin “does not gather men together in a common idea, into an association, into a partnership.” Instead, sin “splits men up into single individuals and holds each individual fast as a sinner, a splitting up that in another sense is both harmonized with and teleologically oriented to the perfection of existence.”1393 In Christ, God works towards fuller perfection of existence by clearing away all the illusory abstractions that prevent the self from becoming itself and from becoming concrete. With Christ as our criterion, we see that abstractions such as

the nation, the people, the crowd, the public, etc....simply do exist for God; for God in Christ there live only single individuals (sinners). Yet God can very well encompass the whole; he can take care of the sparrows to boot. God is indeed a friend of order, and to that end he is present in person at every point, is everywhere present at every moment...God does not avail himself of an abridgment; he comprehends (comprehendit) actuality itself, all its particulars; for him the single individual does not lie beneath the concept.1394

Before God every individual is transparent as a single individual. In human individuals themselves this is reflected in the phenomenon of conscience.1395 Through faith and conscience, then, the individual “is grounded transparently in the power that established it.” But every human existence that is not conscious of itself before God, “that does not rest transparently in God but vaguely rests in and merges in some abstract universality (state, nation, etc.),” is at bottom despair.1396

Now we begin to see what is implied in Christianity’s intention to make man into something “extraordinary.” We also see that

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1393 SUD, 120 n / SV' XI, 230 n.
1394 SUD, 121 / SV' XI, 230–231.
1395 SUD, 124 / SV' XI, 233.
1396 SUD, 14 and 46 / SV' XI, 128 and 158.
human understanding has not only one, but two good reasons to become offended at the idea. First, the idea offends religious respect for the majesty of God: it is absurd to imagine that God would care about single individuals and their sin. Second, the idea offends ethical respect for the universal: to promote the single individual’s relationship of conscience to God means to bereave the universal concepts and the established order of their authority.

From *Practice in Christianity*, Part II, we learn that there is one more good reason, a third one, to become offended at the Christian idea of the single individual. Anti-Climacus points out to us that the Christian ethics of the single individual not only demands the individual obey his conscience rather than the external authorities of established order. The Christian ethics also binds the single individual to become a follower and imitator of Christ. But in the given historical actuality to be a follower of Christ implies voluntary suffering “on account of the Word” (Matthew 13:21) and “for righteousness sake” (Mathew 5:11). Anti-Climacus points out that Christ himself warns of this particular possibility of offense in John 16:1–2, where he says to his disciples: “This I have told you so that you will not be offended. They will exclude you from the synagogues; yes, the time will come when whoever kills you will think he is offering God a service.” But this involves a self-contradiction: to be punished because one does the good, and in this self-contradiction lies again the possibility of offense. Anti-Climacus claims that without faith in Christ and faith in eternal happiness no human understanding could endure this in the real-life situation, “to be persecuted, cast out from society, and finally put to death—and in such a way that everyone who does it will think he is doing God a service.” Without faith, offense would be inevitable.

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But, according to Anti-Climacus, the possibility of offense lies not only in the idea and demand that every human being should become a single individual and an imitator of Christ. It also lies in the incomprehensibility of sin and, finally, in the incomprehensibility of the forgiveness of sin and of the God-man himself.

Anti-Climacus suggest that the Christian conception of sin differs essentially from a conception based on rational philosophical inquiry. If Socrates had defined what sin is, he would have said that sin is ignorance. Christianity, however, wants to go deeper than this by going beyond the proper sphere of reason. Christianity assumes that there is a dialectical interplay between knowing and willing, and traces sin back to the will behind ignorance. From the Christian point of view Socrates was partly right: sin indeed manifests itself in ignorance. But the root of sin is in the will that may either clarify or obscure knowing. However, there is no way that the ignorant, that is, the sinful and defiant human being, would learn this by himself through a civilized philosophical discussion and recollection. It is namely so that just because he is in sin, “no man of himself and by himself can say what sin is.” In order to make the individual aware of how deeply sin is rooted in man’s nature, a revelation from God is needed. This revelation reveals that sin is not willing to understand what is right, because it is not willing what is right; moreover, sin is to do wrong and to refrain from doing right, even though one understands what is right. Naturally, these accusations contained in the Christian revelation are hard to take, especially since the sinful individual cannot really comprehend (begribe) what is revealed to him, but is obliged only to believe it. In consequence, there is a strong possibility of being offended. Compared with the courteous, gentleman-like

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1399 *SUD*, 48 and 87–93 / *SVI* XI, 160 and 199–204.
1400 *SUD*, 95–96 / *SVI* XI, 205–206. (Translation slightly altered.)
1401 *SUD*, 95 / *SVI* XI, 206.
Socratic communication that respects the self-understanding and autonomy of the interlocutor, the Christian teaching “is nothing but offensiveness [Nærgaaenbd] toward man, charge upon charge.” It claims that his sin is not just negativity (weakness, sensuousness, finitude, ignorance, etc.), but a “position,” that is, something that the human individual assumes through an act of his free will. This the human individual cannot see or comprehend by speculative reason, for it is a “dogma,” and if he does not believe it by virtue of paradoxical faith, he is bound to be offended at it.\footnote{SUD, 95–97 and 100 / SV1 XI, 206–207 and 210.}

Anti-Climacus nowhere specifies how and where the individual is being charged by Christianity. We already encountered the same obscurity in the texts by Vigilius and Climacus.\footnote{See subdivision 5.2.2 and chapter 6 above.} Is it the oral teaching of Christ, the words of his sermons that constitute the accusation? Or is it his fate in the hands of men as reflected in the conscience of the sympathetic individual? Probably it is both in combination. Anyway, it is clear that, in order to become conscious of his sin, someone (the God-man) or something (the life of the God-man) in the historical actuality must accuse the individual and the individual must accept the accusation in his heart. In other words, a passionate and passive relating to the historical actuality outside the proper limits of the individual is needed, if the individual is to be brought up to become a self-conscious self: he must “let himself be poetically composed” in the historical actuality, where he belongs.

In this upbringing the individual will have to face some additional “possibilities of offense.” First, not only the idea of sin, but also the idea that sin may be forgiven may offend the human understanding. Anti-Climacus writes that “it takes a singularly high degree of spiritlessness..., if one is not a believer (and if one is a believer, one does believe that Christ was God), not to be offended...
at someone’s claim to forgive sins. Anti-Climacus elucidates this further in *Practice in Christianity*, Part II: “To forgive sins is in the most decisive sense a qualification in terms of God,” and now, in the situation of contemporaneity, “an individual human being like everybody else” purports to forgive sins! The individual is bound to be offended if he does not believe the claim of that man that he is God. But then again, the God-man constitutes the possibility of offense par excellence. That the paradox of the God-man is apt to offend the human understanding was pointed out already by Johannes Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments*. Anti-Climacus emphasizes this strongly in *Practice in Christianity*. According to him, there is “no crazier composite” in the situation of contemporaneity than an individual human being that is God. He writes:

Essentially offense is related to the composite of God and man, or to the God-man...

Offense in the strictest sense...therefore relates to the God-man and has two forms. It is either in relation to the loftiness that one is offended, that an individual human being claims to be God, acts or speaks in a manner that manifests God..., or the offense is in relation to the lowliness, that the one who is God is this lowly human being, suffering as a lowly human being...

*Practice in Christianity*, Part II, entitled “Blessed Is He Who Is Not Offended at Me,” contains a thorough “biblical exposition” that shows how Christ was aware and warned his disciples of both forms of “essential offense”: of “the offense of in relation to loftiness” and of “the offense of in relation to lowliness.”

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1404 SUD, 116 / SVI XI, 226.
1405 PC, 101 / SVI XII, 96.
1407 PC, 81–82 / SVI XII, 78–79.
In *The Sickness unto Death* there is already a preview of this exposition. Anti-Climacus writes there that out of love God becomes man in order to show “what it is to be a human being” and takes the form of a lowly servant, a humble man, “so that no man will feel himself excluded or think that it is human status and popularity with men that bring a person closer to God.” Here equality between God and human beings is established, but at the same time difference remains—God claims that he is still God: “Look this way, he says, and know for certain what it is to be a human being, but take care, for I am also God—blessed is he who takes no offense at me.” In the terminology of *Practice in Christianity*, the possibility of offense is here “in relation to loftiness,” that is, in relation to the claim of that humble man that he is God. The opposite possibility of offense arises, when it becomes manifest that—in accordance with worldly, human standards—that humble man is completely powerless and helpless and thus he is as far as possible from being the almighty God. Here the offense is “in relation to lowliness.” First there is the claim that “the Father and I are one,” then there is, as it were, the additional clause, “yet I am this simple, insignificant man, poor, forsaken, surrendered to man’s violence—blessed is he who takes no offense at me.”

Given all these possibilities of offense, there are, indeed, plenty of good reasons for the individual to take offense and to remain in despair. But in addition to these reasons, there is the fundamental reason that the individual is in sin and wants to remain in the totality of sin. To use the terminology of Climacus, while the possibility of offense is constituted by the paradoxical and incomprehensible character of Christianity, the actualization of offense appears to be due to the actuality of sin within the human individual.

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1410 See *SUD*, 128 / *SVI* XI, 237.
Even before revelation the individual exists in sin. This follows from the Christian point of view. According to Anti-Climacus, “from a higher point of view” paganism is immersed in sin. The pagan was namely “not conscious before God as spirit” and, therefore, “in the innermost being of the pagan there was despair.” The sin of paganism is “despairing ignorance of God, of existing before God.”

To interpret, from the Christian point of view, beings intended to be spirits, selves that should have grounded themselves transparently in the power that had established them, had in paganism forgotten the true character of that power. In consequence, the individuals were in a state of despair: even if they were not aware of it, in the light of his own faith Anti-Climacus, the concerned Christian “physician,” sees that such spirits must have been in a state of despair. But, in the light of faith, to be in the state of despair is to be immersed in sin, since it is not to relate to oneself and to God in accordance with the eternal truth and God’s will. According to the paradoxical Christian dogma, this state is grounded in “hereditary sin,” which is there in every human being as a disposition, as defiance that as a position actively turns down the efforts of God to approach and help human individuals. Now, after revelation, after the human self has been made conscious of itself, of its defiant basic disposition, the self does not give up its well-established position just like that. It still wants to keep hold of the totality, which it has posited and to which it belongs, and this is what constitutes the sin proper, “after

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1411 SUD, 46 / SV1 XI, 158 together with SUD, 81 / SV1 XI, 193. The view is the same as that of Vigilius Haufniensis in The Concept of Anxiety and that of Climacus in Philosophical Fragments and Postscript, cf. CA, 93 / SV1 IV, 363; PF, 13–15 / SV1 IV, 183–185; CUP, 583–584 / SV1 VII, 508–509.
1413 See SUD, 5 / SV1 XI, 117.
1415 Cf. SUD, 93 / SV1 XI, 204.
being taught by a revelation from God what sin is—before God in despair not to will to be oneself or in despair to will to be oneself.”

According to Anti-Climacus, the reason why the individual remains in despair is then, not only the offending incomprehensibility of the Christian revelation, but the fact that sin is a position. He writes that when salvation is offered from without, but the human individual turns it down and remains in despair, this makes it clear that “despair does not come from the outside but from within.” This shows that sin is “an act,” that it is “a position.”

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But what is “the position” of sin now after all? Is it an act or is it a state? Anti-Climacus appears to think that it is both. On the one hand, he writes that “[i]n the life of the spirit there is no standing still [Stilstand] (really no state [Tilstand], either; everything is actualization [Actualitet]),”1418 and he claims:

Every actual moment of despair [ethvert Fortvivlelesens virkelige Øieblicket] is traceable to possibility; every moment [the person] is in despair he is bringing it upon himself. It is always the present tense; in relation to the actuality there is no pastness of the past: in every actual moment of despair the person in despair bears all the past as a present in possibility. The reason for this is that to despair is a qualification of spirit and relates to the eternal in man.1419

But, on the other hand, he writes that “sin is a position that on its own develops an increasingly established continuity,” claims that “sin grows every moment that one does not take leave of it,” and states: “In the deepest sense, the state of sin is the sin; the particular sins are not the continuance of sin but the expression for the

1416 SUD, 96 / SV1 XI, 207.
1418 SUD, 94 / SV1 XI, 205. (Translation slightly altered.)
1419 SUD, 17 / SV1 XI, 131.
continuance of sin; in the specific new sin the impetus of sin merely becomes more perceptible to the eye. The state of sin is a worse sin than the particular sins; it is the sin.\footnote{SUD, 106 / SVI XI, 216.}

Here we meet again the same controversy that we met earlier as a controversy between the views of Vigilius Haufniensis (sin as a qualitative leap, as a transition) and Johannes Climacus (sin as a state). However, Anti-Climacus offers tools to untangle the controversy. He shows how the act and state become synthesized in human existence: how the continuance of sin is established by the activity of the human spirit.

According to Anti-Climacus, both the believer and the demonic individual fear to lose the totality, in which each has his life—the former the totality of the good, the latter the totality of the evil.\footnote{SUD, 107–108 / SVI XI, 217–218.} He writes:

\begin{quote}
Every existence that is within the qualification spirit, even if only on its own responsibility and at its own risk, has an essential interior consistency and a consistency in something higher, at least in an idea. Such a person has great fear of any inconsistency, because he has an immense apprehension of what the result can be, that he could be torn out of the totality in which he has his life \[\text{det Totale, hvori han har sit Liv}\]. The slightest inconsistency is an enormous loss, for, after all, he loses consistency. In that very moment, the spell is perhaps broken, the mysterious power that bound all his capacities in harmony is diminished, the coiled spring is slackened; everything perhaps becomes a chaos in which the capacities in mutiny battle one another and plunge the self into suffering, a chaos in which there is no agreement within itself, no momentum, no impetus.\footnote{SUD, 107 / SVI XI, 217.}
\end{quote}

Hence, yes, the “totality” of sin, i.e. the “state” of sin, is established through constant actualization; but, on the other hand, the total-
ity of sin holds the demonic together "strengthening him with its consistency." But, at the same time, when the spirit makes the transitions, it aims at constancy and at meaningful, consistent totalities, and thus one may speak of the "state" of sin. We could say that the individual constantly situates himself in the totality of sin or in the totality of faith, in the totality of the good or in the totality of the evil.

The state of sin appears to be caused by the "dialectical interplay between knowing and willing" that characterizes in the life of spirit. In this dialectical interplay the state of awareness and the active will that intends it mutually condition each other. In this way Anti-Climacus seems to solve the controversy between the views presented by Vigilius Haufniensis (sin as "a qualitative leap" or "transition in the sphere of freedom") and Johannes Climacus (sin as "a state"). The spiritual structure of human being is a dialectical combination of state and transition. That this is the view of Anti-Climacus with regard to sin is confirmed indirectly by his definition of faith as "a state" of self that is constituted by constant "relating" that takes place in accordance with the structure established by God. It is also confirmed by his statement

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1424 SUD, 30 / SV1 XI, 142.
1425 Cf. SUD, 93–94 / SV1 XI, 204–205.
1426 Cf. SUD, 48 and 94 / SV1 XI, 160 and 205.
1427 See chapter 6 above
1428 See SUD, 14 / SV1 XI, 128: "The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it." (Italics have been added; translation slightly altered.) From other passages it becomes clear that this "state" is faith (see SUD, 49 and 131 / SV1 XI, 160 and 241). In this state, the synthesis structure established by God is in its proper order (cf. SUD, 16 / SV1 XI, 130).
that “every state of sin is a new sin,” which suggests that the state of sin is constituted by constant relating.

But if Anti-Climacus is able to solve the theoretical problem by explicating the dialectic of knowing and willing, on the other hand the solution indicates a complex practical problem. If the human spiritual life is already determined by the actuality of sin, it becomes questionable whether there actually is any room for a free choice between taking offense and accepting faith. While at first we asked why anyone would be offended at the divine help offered, it now becomes all too clear that in practice the problem is the opposite. The combination of sinful willing and sinful knowing creates a vicious circle that incloses the self in, apparently, a non-breakable “inclosed reserve.” In the light of the “encompassing nature” of sin (dens totale Bestemmelse), it becomes understandable why the person in despair performs a demonic resistance against the good and remains in despair. If he became converted, his self would truly have to “be broken,” with the consequence that his former spiritual life would come to its end.

According to Anti-Climacus, even if in encountering Christ the individual might realize that Christ represents the truth, before too long this knowledge tends to be obscured. As time goes by, the dialectical interplay of knowing and willing leads the individual back into darkness and ignorance. The critical moment is the moment of transition from having understood something to doing it. Anti-Climacus writes:

If a person does not do what is right at the very second he knows it—then, first of all, knowing simmers down. Next comes the question of how willing appraises what is known. Willing is dialectical and has

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1429 SUD, 105 / SVI XI, 215.
1430 See SUD, 105 / SVI XI, 215.
1431 Cf. SUD, 65 / SVI XI, 177.
1432 SUD, 93 / SVI XI, 204.
under it the entire lower nature of man. If willing does not agree with what is known, then it does not necessarily follow that willing goes ahead and does the opposite of what knowing understood (presumably such strong opposites are rare); rather, willing allows some time to elapse...During all this, knowing becomes more and more obscure, and the lower nature gains the upper hand more and more; alas, for the good must be done immediately, as soon as it is known..., but the lower nature’s power lies in stretching things out. Gradually, willing’s objection to this development lessens; it almost appears to be in collusion. And when knowing has become duly obscured, knowing and willing can better understand each other; eventually they agree completely, for now knowing has come over to the side of willing and admits that what it wants is absolutely right. And this is how perhaps the great majority of men live: they work gradually at eclipsing their ethical and ethical-religious comprehension, which would lead them out into decisions and conclusions that their lower nature does not much care for, but they expand their esthetic and metaphysical comprehension, which ethically is a diversion.

In other words, sin keeps hold of the self insidiously and persistently. There is a tacit, dialectical movement from the existential encounter with the truth to the spiritless aesthetic and metaphysical comprehension of it. In this movement the possibility of ethical-religious inwardness and earnestness is given up little by little. In *The Concept of Anxiety* Vigilius Haufniensis analyzed how the ethical-religious truth is “lost pneumatically.” Here we encounter the same phenomenon of demonic intellectual dismissal. In *The Sickness unto Death* Anti-Climacus delineates how the sinful individual eventually dismisses Christianity “by declaring it to be untruth.” The reflective individual declares Christianity to be a lie and denies Christ either docetically or rationalistically—“either Christ does not become an individual human being but only ap-

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1433 SUD, 94 / SV1 XI, 205.
pears to be,” which is the position of docetism, “or he becomes only an individual human being,” which is the rationalistic way to explain away the paradox. However, writes Anti-Climacus, by denying Christ as the paradox, one denies at the same time “all that is essentially Christian: sin, the forgiveness of sins, etc.” Anti-Climacus claims that this intellectual dismissal of Christianity actually signifies “sin against the Holy Spirit” and “the highest intensification of sin.” It is, no doubt, impossible to argue against such dismissal on rational grounds. By all appearance, reason seems to be on the side of the reflective denial of Christ as the paradox. Hence, it seems to be a complete mystery, why someone would actually accept faith instead of dismissing Christ.

However, from certain passages of The Sickness unto Death we may derive an argument against the dismissal. Here we return to the ideal of living poetically. Considered as an outcome of the attempt to live a meaningful life in temporal and finite actuality with the prospect of eternity and infinitude kept open, “inclosed reserve” in all its forms is obviously a failure. If the individual despairs of the eternal—cuts himself off from the eternal as a desiring, willing, and acting individual—the eternal does not become concrete in his life and he fails to become a self. And if in Christ the eternal really approaches the human being, then to dismiss Christ is a kind of spiritual suicide, after which there will be no meaning in life, although life itself continues.

Even if not constructed by Anti-Climacus himself, this argument is backed up by several passages of his text. As noted above, he writes, for example, that the defiant self may strive to be itself as much as it pleases, “in its despairing striving to be itself [the self] works itself into the very opposite, it really becomes no self,” if it does not obey the power that has established it. If the individual gives up the thought that God pays attention to him, his self will

at no moment be eternally steadfast. In his imaginary sovereignty he becomes “a king without a country, actually ruling over noth-
ing.” As we noticed above, the critique is in essence the same as the one directed against ironic existence in *The Concept of Irony*, and here, too, its positive ground appears to be the ethical-religious ideal of living poetically. Anti-Climacus maintains that, in order to become his true self, the individual must recognize the power over itself, must “put on his own self” and see his given, concrete self “with these natural capacities, predispositions, etc. in this specific concretion of relations etc.” as his task.\footnote{SUD, 68–69 / SVI XI, 180.}

The ideal of living poetically also looms in the background of Anti-Climacus’ criticism of the demonic. Anti-Climacus points out how, as a move in the drama of life, the demonic dismissal of the help offered is madness. As was recounted above, the demonic comes into being as the defiant person that wants to realize himself yet comes across with some fundamental defect in himself, with “a thorn in the flesh.” Instead of seeking help from God, the person becomes demonic. In his demonic defiance (*Trods*) he now just wants to stick to his misery: he wants to be himself “for spite” (*paa Trods*) without accepting the consolation offered to him by the eternal.\footnote{SUD, 73–74 / SVI XI, 184–185.} Anti-Climacus concludes:

Figuratively speaking, it is as if an error slipped into an author’s writing and the error became conscious of itself as an error—perhaps it actually was not a mistake but in a much higher sense an essential part of the whole production—and now this error wants to mutiny against the author, out of hatred toward him, forbidding him to correct it and in maniacal defiance saying to him: No, I refuse to be

\footnote{See SUD, 68 / SVI XI, 179–180.}
erased; I will stand as a witness against you, a witness that you are a second-rate author.1439

Fundamentally, the demonic defiance is self-contradictory and in that sense irrational, since the individual, on the one hand, acknowledges God’s sovereignty and, on the other hand, wants to deny it. Instead of being brought up by the divine author and director of the play, the individual comes to rebel against him, which is a rather comic aberration from the ideal of living poetically.

A tone of tragedy characterizes the next form of despair, the despair over one’s sin. Here the individual is conscious of his sin before God, but closes himself within himself and in “ungodly toughness” closes off both the good and repentance.1440 The result is not only emptiness, but self-conscious emptiness exemplified, for example, by the character of Macbeth in Shakespeare’s play. Anti-Climacus comments:

By sin, that is, by despairing over his sin, he has lost all relation to grace and also to himself. His selfish self culminates in ambition. He has now in fact become the king, and yet, in despairing over his sin and of the reality of repentance, of grace, he has also lost himself; he cannot even keep on going by himself, and he is no closer to enjoying his self at the height of his ambition than he is to grasping grace.1441

But, granted that the pathological cases that fall short of the ideal of living poetically are either comic or tragic, what if the individual dismisses both Christianity and the ideal of living poetically not negatively, by falling short of them, but positively, by declaring them to be “a lie and untruth”?1442 Is he not then eternally safe from all the Romantic and Christian fantasy alike, and free to live his life reasonably? Perhaps, from his own point of

1439 *SUD*, 74 / *SVI* XI, 185.
1441 *SUD*, 110 / *SVI* XI, 220.
view, but not from the point of view of Christianity and the ideal of living poetically. From the point of view of the ideal, he is still leading an empty and abstract life: he has not become a “concrete” self, but exists in desperate intellectual doubleness, hovering above his life like an ironist did in his abstract reflection. From the point of view of Christianity he suffers from the most terrible “sickness unto death”: he has denied him who is “the resurrection and the life” and is now on his way to the eternal perdition. For after God stepped down and in Christ “approached the grave,” death has been overcome and the individual cannot exist anymore towards “absolute infinite nothingness” as the ironist did. At the same time, a new and much more horrifying prospect has opened up: the prospect of an eternal state of despair that will follow after death and the judgment.  

7.1.4 Life in Faith

Above we have investigated, first, how the elements that pertain to the ideal of living poetically figure in Anti-Climacus’ view of becoming oneself (subdivision 7.1.1). Second, we have followed his sketch on the development of self through the forms of despair that precede the situation, in which the self must choose either to be offended or to accept faith (subdivision 7.1.2). Third, we have investigated his view on the motives of offense and on the dialectical position of sin that, in his view, lie behind becoming offended (subdivision 7.1.3). Let us now, fourth and last, investigate his view on what happens to the self if, instead of offense and sin, the individual chooses faith.

This we have, in fact, already touched on here and there above. First, we have learned that faith is a state of the self, in which de-

spair is completely rooted out and that in this state “the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it.” The power that has established the self is, according to Anti-Climacus, no doubt God as the Creator. Transparently the self bases itself in God at the present time—“at every moment” (i ethvert Øieblik)—as a sinner through faith in Christ. Second, we have found out the possibly offending circumstance that it is the single individual that is grounded transparently in God. The possibility of offense lies, according to Anti-Climacus, in the idea that “a human being should have this reality [Realitet]: that as an individual human being a person is directly before God.” According to Anti-Climacus, this means that Christianity wants to make man into something extraordinary. Anti-Climacus writes that the self gains “infinite” and “staggering” (uhyre) reality by being conscious of existing directly before God and by becoming a human self whose criterion is God. Moreover, in Christ God is not only the qualitative “criterion” (Maalestok), with which the self now measures itself, but also its ethical “goal” (Maal), towards which it should strive.

1444 SUD, 14 together with 49 and 131 / SV I XI, 128 together with 160 and 241. (Translation slightly altered.)
1445 SUD, 15 / SV I XI, 129: “Not to be in despair must signify the destroyed possibility of being able to be in despair; if a person is truly not to be in despair, he must at every moment (i ethvert Øieblik) destroy the possibility.” The idea is the same we encountered in The Concept of Anxiety: “The only thing that is truly able to disarm the sophistry of sin is faith, courage to believe that the state itself is a new sin, courage to renounce anxiety without anxiety, which only faith can do; faith does not thereby annihilate anxiety, but, itself eternally young, it extricates itself from anxiety’s moment of death. Only faith is able to do this, for only in faith is the synthesis eternal and at every moment (i ethvert Øieblik) possible. (CA, 117 / SV I IV, 385.)”
The words of Anti-Climacus here bring to mind the description of the Christian way of living poetically in *The Concept of Irony*. Magister Kierkegaard wrote in it that the pious Christian knows himself as that person who “has reality for God” (*har Realitet for Gud*) and is aware of his life as upbringing, education, in which his task is to develop the seeds God himself has placed in him.¹⁴⁴⁸ The idea of Anti-Climacus seems to be in essence the same. The self-understanding, the identity of the self changes, when it becomes “directly before God” (*lige over for Gud*). At the same time the self becomes aware that God wants to bring it up by positing it a higher task. The difference is that here in *The Sickness unto Death* it is claimed that God wants to make the Christian into something “extraordinary” and this turns out to be nothing less than that which serves as the qualitative criterion and as the ethical goal of the Christian, i.e. God himself in Christ. In *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus still proposed the idea that the Christian should imitate Christ only as a thought-possibility, as a utopian ideal that some Christians may posit to themselves.¹⁴⁴⁹ But here, in *The Sickness unto Death*, Anti-Climacus presents the imitation of Christ as a plain and unequivocal demand implied in the incarnation of God. It is God himself that in Christ wants to bring the human individual up and mould him into his own image and, therefore, it is not unrealistic to have Christ as one’s ethical goal. Later, in *Practice in Christianity*, both the demand of imitation and its implications for the individual, who lives in the present historical and social actuality, are made clear.

In the state of faith delineated by Anti-Climacus the individual, in being itself and in willing to be itself, bases its existence (*grunder*) transparently in God. With reference to *Practice in Christianity*, Part II, we argued above that this implies direct and

¹⁴⁴⁸ CI, 280 / SV1 XIII, 352.
¹⁴⁴⁹ See subdivision 5.3.
absolute obedience to God in everyday life. This interpretation is confirmed indirectly by what Anti-Climacus writes in *The Sickness unto Death*. He writes:

Sin is: before God in despair not to will to be oneself, or before God in despair to will to be oneself. Even though this definition may in other respects be conceded to have its merits (and of all of them, the most important is that it is the only Scriptural definition, for Scripture always defines sin as disobedience), is not this definition too spiritual? The first and foremost answer to that must be: A definition of sin can never be too spiritual...for sin is specifically a qualification of spirit. Furthermore, why is it assumed to be too spiritual? Because it does not mention murder, stealing, fornication, etc.? But does it not speak of these things? Are not they also self-willfulness against God, a disobedience that defies his commandments? On the other hand, if in considering sin we mention only such sins, we so easily forget that, humanly speaking, all such things may be quite in order up to a point, and yet one’s whole life may be sin, the familiar kind of sin: the glittering vices, the self-willfulness that either in spiritlessness or with effrontery goes on being or wants to be ignorant of the human self’s far, far deeper obligation in obedience to God with regard to its every clandestine desire and thought, with regard to its readiness to hear and understand and its willingness to follow every least hint from God as to his will for this self.\(^{1450}\)

Indirectly we are here told what is expected from someone who grounds his existence transparently in God, i.e. from someone who has faith. We see that faith makes up a totality that contains not only a certain relation to God and to oneself, but also a certain external and internal activity. Obedience both in the external and in the internal activity is implied in faith. The passage also points out that the Christian—apparently aided by his conscience\(^ {1451} \)—is supposed to obey God directly as a single individual. Anti-

\(^{1450}\) *SUD*, 82 / *SV1* XI, 193–194.

\(^{1451}\) *Cf. SUD*, 124 / *SV1* XI, 233.
Climacus writes that the individual ought to have “readiness to hear and understand” and “willingness to follow every least hint from God as to his will for this self.” In other words, it is not enough to follow the general commandments God has given to people; in his inwardness the individual shall constantly seek to find out what is God’s specific will with him in particular. The idea of Anti-Climacus is that God does not relate to the individual only through “the universal,” but relates to them directly. He writes that God is “a friend of order” that does not allow human beings to run together in the crowd. For God in Christ “there live only single individuals.” Thus, in the social and historical actuality every individual Christian is supposed to fulfill God’s demands in accordance with his personal relation to God. This does not mean ignoring social actuality, but regarding all the social relationships as constituted by the personal relationship each and every individual, at least potentially, has to God.

Anti-Climacus also clearly indicates that the Christian obedience to God implies imitation of Christ in the given historical and social actuality. In considering the would-be Socratic definition of sin that “sin is ignorance,” Anti-Climacus notes that the definition is deficient in that it lacks the constituent of the will. However, he notes that there is also obviously truth in the Socratic view. It is namely all too common to understand in theory how one is to live, and at the same time to ignore it in one’s personal practice. In this connection Anti-Climacus brings forth the demand to imitate Christ in one’s personal life. He writes:

> When I see someone who declares he has completely understood how Christ went around in the form of a lowly servant, poor, despised, mocked, and, as Scripture tells us, spat upon—when I see the same person assiduously make his way to the place where in worldly

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1453 SUD, 117–118 and 121 / SVI XI, 227 and 230.
sagacity it is good to be, set himself up as securely as possible, when I see him then so anxiously, as if his life depended on it, avoiding every gust of unfavorable wind from the right or the left, see him so blissful, so extremely blissful, so slap-happy, yes, to make it complete, so slap-happy that he even thanks God for—for being wholeheartedly honored and esteemed by all, by everyone—then I have often said privately to myself: "Socrates, Socrates, Socrates, can it be possible that this man has understood what he says he has understood?"  

How the person lives in this historically given actuality, in the real world, is thus implied in the totality of life pertaining to faith.

In *The Sickness unto Death* Anti-Climacus also takes a stand on the social and political issues that made themselves known around Europe while Kierkegaard was writing the treatise from March to May 1848. The Socratic-Christian position of the single individual that Anti-Climacus expresses in his treatise is his political position. It contains a considered (anti)political policy. Anti-Climacus writes: "Popular opinion maintains that the world needs a republic, needs a new social order and a new religion—but no one considers that what the world, confused simply by too much knowledge, needs is a Socrates." In other words, if the world consisted of such ethical-religious individuals as Socrates, everything would be in order; but as long as it does not, no reform in the external world will help. This is the position of Anti-Climacus with regard to the burning social and political issues of his times.

To conclude, it is clear that the historical and social actuality is taken into consideration in *The Sickness unto Death*. Moreover, we have good evidence to support that, according to Anti-Climacus, the individual is to situate himself in the historical and social actuality according to the ideal of living poetically. But as a psychological treatise *The Sickness unto Death* has the inwardness of the sub-

\textsuperscript{1454} *SUD*, 91–92 / *SVI XI*, 202–203.

\textsuperscript{1455} *SUD*, 92 / *SVI XI*, 203.
ject as its focus. Therefore it is understandable that the description of the context of existence is not that rich in it. In Practice in Christianity we are given a much more comprehensive description of how the Christian lives poetically in the given historical-social actuality.

### 7.2 The Test of Christian Life

In Practice in Christianity Anti-Climacus argues that we should not approach the object of faith, Jesus Christ, through world history, through “history directly understood.” Instead, we should approach him through the sacred history, in which Christ himself approaches us, not as an object of knowledge, but as “the sign of offense.” By “the sacred history” Anti-Climacus refers to the history of Jesus Christ “that the apostles and followers who believed in him have recorded,” that is, to the history that relates “the story of his life in the state of abasement, also that he claimed to be God.” Assuming, as a believer does, that in and through

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1456 PC, 23 / SV1 XII, 22. Unlike Climacus in Philosophical Fragments, who considered the historical as a sphere of belief (see PF, 79–86 / SV1 IV, 242–249), but like Climacus in Postscript, Anti-Climacus seems to recognize that there is historical knowledge that is not based on belief. However, as Climacus in Postscript (cf. CUP, 81, 134, and 575 / SV1 VII, 62, 109, and 501), Anti-Climacus considers such historical knowledge as fundamentally illusory, especially when it takes to its object the existence of the God in time that by definition can never be an object of historical knowledge. Through profane history, in contradiction to sacred history, one “cannot know anything at all about Christ,” since such history “makes Christ into someone else than he is in truth (PC, 25–26 / SV1 XII, 24).” In other words: In as much as critical historical research considers Jesus of Nazareth as an ordinary human being, it has already tacitly given up the notion that he was Christ, Messiah, God as a man. Therefore, by definition, such research can never come to know anything about Christ.

1457 PC, 56 / SV1 XII, 53.

1458 PC, 30 / SV1 XII, 528.
this history the absolute relates to us and wants to transform us, this history must be considered as standing alone by itself, outside history in general.\textsuperscript{1459} Anti-Climacus argues further that “in relation to the absolute, there is only one time, the present,” and since Christ is the absolute “in relation to him there is only one situation, the situation of contemporaneity.”\textsuperscript{1460} He writes:

Christ is no play-actor...; neither is he a merely historical person, since as the paradox he is an extremely unhistorical person. But this is the difference between poetry and actuality: contemporaneity. The difference between poetry and history is surely this, that history is what actually happened, whereas poetry is the possible, the imagined, the poetized. But that which has actually happened (the past) is still not, except in a certain sense (namely, in contrast to poetry), the actual. The qualification that is lacking—which is the qualification of truth (as inwardness) and of all religiousness is—for you. The past is not actuality—for me. Only the contemporary is actuality for me...[E]very human being is able to become contemporary only with the time in which he is living—and then with one more, with Christ’s life upon earth, for Christ’s life upon earth, the sacred history, stands alone by itself, outside history.\textsuperscript{1461}

The passage challenges the central theses of the treatise at hand: first, that Kierkegaard took into consideration the human situatedness in historical actuality, and second, that the poetical elements, such as imagination and passion, play the key role in how he situates the subject into historical actuality. Here Anti-Climacus seems to argue against these theses, first, that the encounter with Christ breaks open the human situatedness in his-

\textsuperscript{1459} PC, 62–64 / SV1 XII, 59–61. This brings to mind the idea of Christianity as a \textit{nota bene} written alongside ordinary historical events; see \textit{Philosophical Fragments} and \textit{Concluding Unscientific Postscript} (PF, 104 / SV1 IV, 266, and CUP, 273 / SV1 VII, 232).

\textsuperscript{1460} PC, 63 / SV1 XII, 60. (Italics have been added.)

\textsuperscript{1461} PC, 63–64 / SV1 XII, 60–61.
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torical actuality so that we may become contemporary with his life, even if we are born eighteen hundred years after it. Second, that there is a clear difference between poetry and history; with poetry one remains in the sphere of the possible and the imagined, and never attains the sphere of historical actuality.

However, as we will see, Anti-Climacus actually refutes in *Practice in Christianity* neither of the theses. He does not deny that human beings, including Christians, remain situated in the historical actuality as long as they exist in the temporal world; contemporaneity with Christ just re-qualifies the human situatedness in the historical world. Neither does he deny that poetical qualities are needed in becoming contemporary with Christ and in living Christianly in the historical world. Imagination and passion are needed both in comprehending Christ as he actually was and in expressing the eternal Christian truth in one’s temporal life. In the following it will be shown that Anti-Climacus himself uses poetic means to make his readers contemporary with Christ and that his view on the ideal Christian life clearly exemplifies the ideal of living poetically familiar to us from the earlier works of Kierkegaard.

7.2.1 Contemporaneity with Christ

When Anti-Climacus argues against the view that we could know something about Christ through “history directly understood,” he does not deny that all human beings, including Jesus of Nazareth and his followers, exist in the historical world. What he argues against is the notion that we could approach Christ through the eighteen hundred years of history that has followed his life and base our faith in Christ on the *historical consequences* of his life. Even if the Church has been victorious in history and made the peoples see Christ in his loftiness, human beings should remember Christ as he was in his abasement and lowliness. It is with this
abased Christ, “the sign of offense,” that they should become contemporaneous in faith.\footnote{1462}  
In order to help his reader attain the situation of contemporaneity, Anti-Climacus uses poetic means. In Part I of Practice in Christianity he re-dramatizes Christ’s invitation in Matthew 11:28, “Come here, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.” He depicts poetically how Christ, out of passionate concern for suffering human beings, has altered his condition into that of the lowliest man and now calls everyone, unconditionally everyone, to share the eternal life with him. He describes how the invitation of the Savior penetrates the finitude, how it goes out, goes along all the paths and calls for human individuals, wherever they are, and wherever they stand at the crossroad of choice. All the sufferers, all the sinners are being invited with the most urgent and pleading tones by Christ, whose life through the silent eloquence of action expresses that he stands totally by his word—that he is what he says, the Word.\footnote{1463}  
This is the speech-act of the Savior and one would assume that as a rejoinder all humanity would accept the invitation and rush to the inviter. But in the situation of contemporaneity another reaction follows. Anti-Climacus describes vividly how every sensible person sees immediately that the inviter is just a lowly human being, who moreover acts without prudence, wastes away his gifts and his chances, and does not know how to take care of his own. Therefore, the sagacious people (all those with understanding, the clergy, philosophers, statesmen, and all the solid citizens) remain skeptical and keep their distance without seriously considering accepting the invitation. Only the most simple and desperate people become enraptured with the inviter, who is now surrounded by tax-collectors, lepers, and madmen, and in addition by simple...
fishermen, tailors, and shoemakers—a ludicrous group of outcasts that worship their teacher and master as their God. But despite the manifest absurdity of the phenomenon, the threat to the established order is real enough for the powerful to fear this unselfish and, therefore, politically incalculable troublemaker, this lunatic blasphemer that imagines himself to be God and condemns the ways of the world. Hence, they lay a trap for him, into which he walks, although he sees it well enough. Now the people, disappointed in their expectations that were for worldly happiness and prosperity, turn their hate and indignation against this self-appointed God, this miracle worker that in the decisive moment turns out to be a loser.¹⁴⁶⁴

In describing the action of Christ and the reaction of the contemporaries, Anti-Climacus does not hesitate to describe the hidden passions and thoughts of these agents the way the playwrights do. Neither does he hesitate to dramatize the Biblical narrative so that the contradiction between the loving, self-sacrificing God and calculating, self-seeking humanity becomes glaring, with the result that the dramatic collision comes to appear inevitable. As a whole, the presentation manages to break the distance of centuries and to bring the event so close to the modern spectators that the contemporaries of Christ turn out to be ourselves. This is also what Anti-Climacus, alias Kierkegaard, has aimed at. In his Journals and Papers Kierkegaard explains that with his poetical presentation he has aimed at a sense of modernity:

The poetic character of the book (and precisely therein lies its awakening character) is in the stamp of modernity it has...

With poetic propriety I have construed his life as having two phases. The first phase in which his reputation is a problem and there is a controversy about him. The second in which the crowds are in-

¹⁴⁶⁴ PC, 37–56 / SVT XII, 35–53.
fluenced by the judgment made on him by those of position and reputation.

...[T]he center of interest in my book is not in a scrupulous correctness about the facts (although, please note, there is nothing that directly controverts anything factual) but in a modernity, that it happens right before our eyes in the dress of our day.

What is presented is the absolute existing in the medium of actuality and in a form of a single human being who is like one of us. This is the paradox. The particular factual details are utilized as cues and therefore have the opposite effect they usually have. As a rule people cling to the purely historical; here the book ventures to interpret this poetically in such a manner that the way the particular sacred words are used provides the commentary on them.

It was just the right thing to do. It would have disturbed the effect if I had stuck too scrupulously to the historical.\textsuperscript{1465}

In other words, despite the clear-cut distinction between the poetical and the historical that he makes in the passage that quoted earlier,\textsuperscript{1466} Anti-Climacus himself uses the poetical to make his modern reader contemporary with this event of absolute significance that has taken place in history. With artistic freedom, he dramatizes the rise and fall of the God-man and places his words in the context of the modern world. In this way he brings out the timeless but living truth that the story contains, so that it applies directly to the members of the modern generation.

What justifies the procedure of Anti-Climacus is the conviction that the history of Jesus Christ is truly the eternal history that holds true with respect to every generation of the human race. Anti-Climacus explains to his reader that with his life Christ expressed the truth. He did not only come to redeem and save the human race, but also to express what the truth must suffer in every

\textsuperscript{1465}JP 6, 6368 / Pap. X I A 163. (Translation slightly altered.)
\textsuperscript{1466}PC, 63–64 / SV I XII, 60–61.
The explanation as to why almost no one accepted the invitation, but almost all turned against him, is not that the particular generation that lived eighteen hundred years ago would have been worse than others. The event does not manifest some accidental characteristics pertaining to those particular people, it manifests the timeless truth: the contradiction between the human and the divine conceptions of compassion and misery.

Anti-Climacus claims that according to the human conception, compassion is proper only “to a certain degree.” Despite a capacity for compassion, in the end, when it really comes to it in actual practice, human beings want to cling to their own—to their privileges, status, and goods. The divine passion, the “unlimited recklessness in concerning oneself with...each sufferer” that was expressed by Jesus Christ, human beings can regard only as a kind of madness, or as ludicrous pride and vanity. “To make oneself quite literally one with the most wretched...this is ‘too much’ for people” in the situation of contemporaneity, that is, when it directly challenges their own ways and habits. But, notes Anti-Climacus, when contemplated from the distance of centuries, there is, of course, nothing excessive and improper in it, quite to the contrary: all of it is very touching.

A similar situation exists with the conception of misery. The modern, so-called Christian does not realize that his actual conception of fundamental human misery, i.e. to be poor and sick, despised by the world, etc., is different from the Christian conception, i.e. to be corrupted by sin. But if he were contemporaneous with Christ, he would come to realize it and, in consequence, he would see what it is that offends the natural human being in Christ’s redeeming activity. Humanly speaking, it is “something downright cruel, something shocking, something over which one

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1467 PC, 34–35 / SV1 XII, 32.
1468 PC, 58–60 / SV1 XII, 55–57.
could become so embittered that one could have the urge to kill the man—to invite the poor and sick and suffering to come—and then to be able to do nothing for them, but instead of that promise them the forgiveness of sins. In other words, even if Jesus healed and fed many, he healed and fed no one for good, so that the person in question would have become permanently free from all the suffering that pertains to temporality. Quite on the contrary, from the human point of view, he left his followers in the lurch. What Christ had come to heal was the ultimate sickness, the sickness unto death, that is, sin. But this his contemporaries could not really understand and, therefore, all his works of charity came to seem to them almost cunning. Anti-Climacus explains:

If it is merely a toothache you have, or it is your house that has burned down, but it has escaped you that you are a sinner, then it is cunning. It is cunning of the inviter to say: I heal all sicknesses, and then when one comes to say: I acknowledge only that there is one sickness—sin—of that and from that I heal all of those 'who labor and are burdened,' all of those who labor to work themselves out of the power of sin, labor to resist evil...

Anti-Climacus uses poetry to make his own contemporaries reflect this and see Christ in the situation of contemporaneity, in which they see him through the possibility of offense. He does this, since it is his conviction that contemporaneity with Christ is the condition of faith (Troens Betingelse) and that no one comes to faith except from the possibility of offense. According to

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1469 PC, 60–61 / SVI XII, 57.
1470 PC, 61 / SVI XII, 58. (Translation slightly altered.) The idea is in harmony with what Anti-Climacus presents in The Sickness unto Death. As a rule the natural man is desperate over something earthly, not over himself, to speak nothing of over his sin. Consequently, sin is not the foremost misery the natural man wishes to get rid of.
1471 PC, 9 and 81 / SVI XII, 1 and 78.
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Anti-Climacus, this is also what Christ himself wanted and wants: to appear as the sign of contradiction (semeion antilegomenon, Luke 2:34) that forces the human being to choose: either to become offended at him, or to believe in him and to become his follower and imitator.1472

Hence, when Anti-Climacus eliminates by poetic means the hermeneutical problems created by the distance of eighteen hundred years that stands between him and the life of Christ, he thinks he serves the timeless will of God. He uses poetic means in presenting Christ as “the specific historical person he was eighteen hundred years ago, and as that specific person, living under the conditions under which he lived at that time.” But, according to Anti-Climacus, this is just what Christ wants as he wants to appear as “the sign of offense and the object of faith” for us, too.1473

According to Anti-Climacus, God tests human beings on purpose. This we may see from the way he acts in Christ. First Christ invites, but then he halts. He seduces by appearing as the expected one, as the king who would save the nation from the hands of its enemy; then he brings the seduced into crisis by turning out to be something altogether different from what they had expected. All this is in accordance with God’s plan.1474 In other words, God is not only the main actor, the victim, of the drama, he is also its author, producer, and director, who has a certain purpose: to posit a test for human individuals.

In as much as the life of Christ communicates something to all human beings, in as much as the message is addressed to and the test is for all the generations alike, the attempt to present Christ in the situation of contemporaneity by poetic means is justified. The “existence-communication” as Climacus calls it, the atemporal

1473 PC, 23 / SV1 XII, 22.
1474 PC, 39–40 / SV1 XII, 38.
word of God expressed in the gospel of God’s incarnation, should never be let to become something past. On the other hand, in that Anti-Climacus re-composes the life of Christ, he does not compose a new poem, but just re-instates the poem of God: he reconstructs a structure that was originally, from the hand of God, a poetic communication. In and through the life of Christ, God wanted to posit a sign of contradiction, to express the divine truth in the situation of contemporaneity. He assumed the form of a humble human being and through this human life indirectly communicated the truth to men and, at the same time, examined them. The examination was and will be concerned with how human beings react to this sign of contradiction. Only if the individual is drawn to Christ in the situation of contemporaneity, despite the possibility of offense, he will learn from Christ what God really understands by compassion and by human misery.

7.2.2 Following of Christ in Christendom

But once the individual has learned what divine compassion and human sinfulness really imply, he should also practice what he has learned, in the actuality where he finds himself in the present historical world. The test is not only whether the human individual will believe in Christ and not become offended at him in the situation of contemporaneity. It is also whether he will then follow Christ and become his imitator despite all the adversities that he is bound to meet.

What is involved in the following of Christ Anti-Climacus outlines in Part III of *Practice in Christianity*, which takes as its topic another line of Christ’s, John 12:32: “And I, when I am

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1476 See PC, 64–66 / SVI XII, 61–63.
lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself.” Here we receive an overview on what it is to live poetically in a Christian way. At the same time Anti-Climacus comes to develop what could be called an ethical-religious hermeneutics of the Christian truth, that is, he develops the view that only he who seeks God and acts according to the Christian truth will truly come to understand it. Ethical striving in historical actuality thus becomes a part of the process of understanding, a means of understanding.

Anti-Climacus begins by defining Christ as an Aristotelian-Hegelian absolute telos of a Christian. He writes that “if a human life is not to be lived altogether unworthily like that of the animal...if a human life is not to be loafed away in inactivity or wasted away in busy activity—then there must be something higher that draws it.” This Aristotelian idea of something higher that draws the human being above the animal level is followed by a Hegelian idea of the telos as the absolute that contains both the movement and the rest, both the development and the final result. Anti-Climacus writes that “if this higher something is to be truly able to draw and at every moment, it must not itself be subject to variation or change but must have triumphantly gone through every change, transfigured like the transfigured life of one who is dead.” According to Anti-Climacus, such absolute telos is the Lord Jesus Christ, who has gone through human life and death, and who will now draw all to himself from on high. Therefore, if the Christian only remembers Christ, then even in the middle of life’s concerns, disappointments, and business, in the middle of the pleasures of the world, anxieties of temptations, and anxiety of sin, the life of the Christian “is properly structured, is oriented toward what is above.”

1477 PC, 151–152 / SVI XII, 141–142.
1478 PC, 152–153 / SVI XII, 142–143. Cf. also PC, 75–76 / SVI XII, 73–74.
The decisive point in this remembrance is, however, that the Christian is to remember Christ not only in his loftiness, but also in his abasement. The one that pronounces in John 12:32 the words, “when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself,” is after all the abased one—the scorned, despised, mocked, spit-upon one. Moreover, the next verse, John 12:33, states explicitly that “being lifted up from the earth” refers to the crucifixion of Christ. Thus, in these words pronounced by Christ to his contemporaries, there is “a sting of truth.” Christ says that after his contemporaries have crucified him, he will draw them from on high. Hence, while the words promise, at the same time they judge. Moreover, they judge not only the generation that lived eighteen hundred years ago and actually crucified Christ, but also the present generation, if it understands the words in the situation of contemporaneity and admits that it would have acted accordingly. The lowliness, the abasement of God and his lot in the hands of man is thus the stumbling stone, the possibility of offense that thrusts away and tests the contemporary listener, tests whether he will become offended at the implied accusation, or repent his sin and convert.

According to Anti-Climacus, the words are meant to make the listener conscious of his sin, so that he would be drawn to Christ in full self-consciousness and, through free choice and repentance, choose Christ as the composite of lowliness and loftiness that he wants to be. This choice also implies that the Christian is willing to suffer what Christ suffered. No one has ever felt naturally drawn to suffering and Christ will not force it upon anyone, notes Anti-Climacus, but prays: “[W]ould that the image of you in your

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1479 PC, 163 / SV1 XII, 152.
1480 PC, 259 / SV1 XII, 236.
1482 PC, 153 / SV1 XII, 143.
1483 PC, 155 and 160 / SV1 XII, 145 and 150.
abasement might stand before us so vividly, so awakening and persuasive, that we will feel ourselves drawn to you in lowliness, drawn to want to be like you in lowliness... From what follows, it becomes clear that by “image” or “sight” Anti-Climacus actually refers to the whole story of Christ’s suffering: how the human race did not want to be akin to Christ, how he was mistreated and misunderstood, how he was love, ready to sacrifice his life to save humankind, and yet everyone turned against him. After recapitulating the story Anti-Climacus appeals to the sense of honor of his reader and asks: “Now, cannot this sight move you—not to tears, which here are inappropriate, superfluous, indeed, even bad if it is not over yourself that you are weeping—but move you to earnestness, to action, to want to suffer at least in some way akin to his suffering?” Anti-Climacus explains that so it once moved the apostles and the fathers of the early Church, who through their love understood that he was love and how he suffered, and understood how wrong it was on the part of humanity to treat him as it did. But just because of their love, writes Anti-Climacus, they did not want revenge, did not wish to strike the world, but wished only to be like their Lord, “to suffer approximately as he suffered in this world.”

Anti-Climacus claims that if the individual is willing to suffer with Christ, there will be opportunity enough for him. Little by little the follower of Christ may be drawn to the utmost suffering. But through suffering he is also brought up little by little, if he takes Christ as his prototype and remains true to him.

According to Anti-Climacus, the proper way to regard life is to regard it as a test or examination in which, at every moment, a

1484 PC, 167 / SVI XII, 156.
1486 PC, 171 / SVI XII, 160.
1487 PC, 178–179 / SVI XII, 166.
1488 PC, 172 / SVI XII, 160.
person is being examined by God. Anti-Climacus explains that when Christ lived here on the earth, he, too, took life’s examination. He wanted to draw all to himself, but at the same time “he himself had to express the truth with his own life, himself had to portray what it is to be truth.” This was his task, and in fulfilling it he learned obedience from what he suffered (Hebrews 5:8). For Christ “temporality in its entirety was suffering and abasement,” but at the same time “he was developed to become and to be the truth.” Now the time of suffering is over, Christ has accomplished his task, has passed his test, and he has been taken up on high. But with his life he posited the prototype (Forbillede) for Christians and left footprints for all those who want to join him and become his imitators (see 1 Pet 2:21). Here we encounter again the ideal of living poetically, and in a very articulate form. We find out that Christ himself “lived poetically” in the sense of the term used by Magister Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Irony*. At the same time Christ set up the Christian model of living poetically or, as Anti-Climacus formulates it in *Practice in Christianity*, the model of “supreme upbringing in the school of life: becoming and being a Christian.”

To prepare the ground for the supreme Christian upbringing, Anti-Climacus first describes “how it ordinarily goes with a person’s upbringing in the school of life or with having to take life’s examination.” The upbringing begins when a youth perceives through his *imagination* an image of perfection and becomes infatuated with this image so that it becomes “his love, his inspiration...his more perfect (more ideal) self.” Through this *passion of love* the young man is now, little by little, “transformed in likeness to this image, which imprints or impresses itself on all his thought...”

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1490 *PC*, 186 / *SV I XII*, 173.
and on every utterance by him.” However, the young man cannot really imagine what it is to hold onto this ideal in actuality, what it is like to be tried day after day in the actual suffering that belongs to the ethical life in this world. He just has the image of such a life before him, but to imagine it is inevitably something different from actually experiencing it. If it were not so, notes Anti-Climacus, there would be no meaning in life: “In that case, Governance would have structured life wrongly, for to what purpose, then, actuality if with the help of the imagination one could in advance absorb it in a completely actual way; to what purpose, then, the seventy years if in the twenty-second year one could have experienced everything?”

Thus the young man walks on the earth at first as if in dream, fascinated by the image that he has grasped through his imagination. But as he starts to discover “the surrounding world of actuality in which he is standing and the relation of this surrounding world to himself,” it starts to become earnest for him. In consequence imagination and infatuation will not suffice anymore, the decisiveness and determination of will is needed. But if the young man humbly wills to express the ideality in the everyday actuality, then imagination has actually deceived him “into the truth.” Now, writes Anti-Climacus, it will depend on loving Governance how hard he will be tested. First, the young man hopes that his suffering is only temporary and with this hope he perseveres. But, perhaps, the suffering just continues until the moment comes when the person discovers that suffering cannot be avoided in the future, either, and that it will only get worse. To exist under this pressure is, according to Anti-Climacus, “to exist with emphasis as a human being.” No one, claims Anti-Climacus, is able to bear such earnest existence without faith in loving Governance. But if the person has this faith and perseveres until the end,

\[1^{491} PC, 186–189 / SVI XII, 173–175. (Italics have been added.)\]
then he has passed the test and has become, in truth, the image that he loved.\footnote{PC, 189–191 / SVI XII, 175–178.}

It is noteworthy, how Anti-Climacus here both shares the general ethical-religious ideal of living poetically with Judge William and revises it. Like in \\textit{Either/Or}, Part II, the ethical individual posits the ideal and then his task is to hold on to this ideal in the actual historical and social world in which he finds himself. If he perseveres, he will develop toward his ideal. But, in contrast to the optimistic vision of Judge William, the vision of Anti-Climacus is more pessimistic: for a truly ethical person there is only more suffering in store in this world. With this view Anti-Climacus differs from the judge and is much more in agreement with the view Climacus presents on the ethical-religious existence in \\textit{Postscript}. However, in contrast to Climacus, Anti-Climacus gives a positive, educative function for the sufferings and persecution that the subject meets in the external world. Whereas Climacus brackets the external sufferings and focuses on the suffering that pertains to the inward God-relationship of a temporal and finite subject, Anti-Climacus binds the inner development of the subject tightly with the suffering in the external world. Whereas Climacus takes the external persecution as a jest to which a high-minded person may take a humorous attitude, Anti-Climacus takes it in earnest from the hand of the upbringing Government.

Having presented how it ordinarily goes with taking life’s examination, i.e. how the individual is brought up in the ethical-religious life, Anti-Climacus describes next how it goes when life’s examination is to become and to be a Christian. In this specific variant of ethical-religious life the image of perfection, which the youth falls in love with, is the image of the abased Christ. However, since the image is still only an image, it cannot convey the actual existence in abasement. In a sense, then, the youth cannot
help but begin with loftiness. First, the image of the loving and infinitely exalted Christ exercises its power of love over him so that little by little his inner being is transformed and he begins to resemble the image. But after this transformation has started to take place in his inwardness the youth is inevitably led to the opposite of loftiness and glory in the external world in which he exists. This is according to Anti-Climacus inevitable, since “in the world of untruth to will to resemble the truth, even poorly and imperfectly, must become lowliness and abasement.”

From now on the love of the youth for Christ will become tested in the world of actuality. At first he may hope that as time goes by it will get easier. But then the moment will come that he gets a clear comprehension and sees from what the prototype had to suffer that the life of the follower is bound to be suffering until the end. As the ultimate result of this development, even God withdraws and forsakes the individual in death. However, if the individual perseveres to the end, still believing that his suffering is only momentarily, then he will pass the test, enter into eternal happiness, and come to him who from on high drew him to himself.

In this way the one who fell in love with the prototype gets to experience the sufferings of the prototype. But in addition there is still extra suffering in store for him that the prototype could not experience. Christ knew clearly, and with certainty, that he was the truth. Hence, he did not have to suffer the anxieties caused by the concern of whether one is in the right or in the wrong in contending with the world. In contrast to Christ, the Christian, who knows himself first of all as a sinner, is not at all so sure about himself. While he is being accused of selfishness and exaggeration by the other “Christians” and by the “Christian” pastors that would like to keep Christianity in the hidden inwardness, he is bound to

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doubt himself. If he would not have the prototype to look at, he would certainly not dare to believe that there was any love within himself. However, writes Anti-Climacus, with the prototype before his eyes, he may believe that everything is in order with the persecution he experiences, since the prototype had to experience the same, even if he was the truth. In this way the image of Christ draws the Christian to Christ.\footnote{\textit{PC}, 196–198 / \textit{SVI} XII, 181–183.}

Anti-Climacus notes that all this suffering may make one think that Christianity and Christ are cruel. But, he argues, that is not the case. In fact, \textit{it is the world that is cruel}.\footnote{\textit{PC}, 196 / \textit{SVI} XII, 181–182.} It is in this muddy world that the true loftiness must appear inversely as lowliness and abasement, just as a star that is actually high above appears to be at the bottom of the sea. This inverse depiction is actually the only true one as long as the element is that of untruth: the world.\footnote{\textit{PC}, 198–199 / \textit{SVI} XII, 183–184.}

But is the imitation of the abased Christ actually still an option in established Christendom, asks Anti-Climacus. Now after Christianity has, first, been victorious and, then, become established in the historical actuality, is it still possible to struggle and suffer for the truth in the modern, Christian world like the first Christians did in the ancient, pagan world?

Anti-Climacus answers that it is still possible to struggle and suffer inasmuch as the Church triumphant and established Christendom that has followed it are actually \textit{illusions}.\footnote{\textit{PC}, 219 / \textit{SVI} XII, 201.} The illusion at the heart of these Christian formations is that the truth of Christianity is considered a truth in the sense of a result that could be established in human society and that could be passed from one generation to another. If that were so, then the Christian cultural heritage would be enough to make us into true Christians. But, in
fact, the Christian truth is not a result, but a way and a life, a life of struggle and self-denial, and each successor must walk the same path as the predecessor did. Christ came into the world to witness the truth with his life and to get imitators that would follow his example. Here the truth is a way that the imitator is to follow, and following this way is what the Christian shall worry about first of all—and as long as he worries about this, he has no result, only the task.

Anti-Climacus writes that “the very beginning of the test of becoming and being a Christian is to become so turned inward that it seems as if all the others do not exist at all for a person, so turned inward that one is quite literally alone in the whole world, alone before God, alone with Holy Scripture as a guide, alone with the prototype before one’s eyes.” If the individual really immerses himself in the Biblical story in this manner, he will be ready to suffer for the sake of his faith in Christ. If it then happens that all those among whom he lives in the actual world are true Christians, then he cannot, of course, witness for the truth and become a martyr as the first Christians did in the pagan world. This, however, he will not find out before the end of his life, and then the problem does not exist for him anymore.

In other words, the individual must first relate himself to the timeless ideal that he apprehends from Scripture and situate himself into the world in accordance with this given script; if he follows this script and confesses Christ not only formally, but through his life, he will find out how the world treats the truth and the good. Given that Governance orders and organizes our lives here in the historical world, Anti-Climacus reasons, suffering and persecution will follow. The idea of Governance cannot be that the majority of human beings become Christians, since in

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1499 PC, 201–211 / SVI XII, 185–194.
1500 PC, 225 / SVI XII, 206.
1501 PC, 225–226 / SVI XII, 206–207.
that case the possibility of Christian self-denial would, indeed, disappear.\footnote{PC, 220–222 / SVI XII, 202–204.} Trusting in Governance, then, the Christian may give up worrying about the imaginary possibility that the majority of people would one day become Christians, and now there is nothing that hinders him from following Christ in truth and from becoming persecuted for that, or is there?

Well, there is, of course, established Christendom that forbids all the exaggerated expressions of Christianity in the external practice, such as doing what Christ himself asked his followers to do, and that demands silent admiration and adoration in the hidden inwardness instead. To make understandable the background and motivation of this strange prohibition, Anti-Climacus outlines the story of how Christian society has developed through history. Once upon a time, he narrates, there was the Church militant:

There was a time when [Christianity], with divine authority, exercised dominion over people, when it addressed each individual briefly, tersely, commanding authoritatively with 'You shall'; when it shocked every individual with a rigorosity that hitherto was never known: eternal punishment. This rigorosity helped; in fear and trembling before the inescapable hereafter, the Christian was able to disdain all the dangers and sufferings of this life as child’s play and a half-hour prank. Yes, this rigorosity helped; it made it really true that to be a Christian is to be in kinship with divinity.\footnote{PC, 229–230 / SVI XII, 210.}

But Satan was cunning, and when he found out that no thread or violence helped against these martyrs he changed his plan and conjured up the Church triumphant: “Little by little he deluded the Christian Church into thinking that now it had been victorious, now it should have a good rest after the battle and enjoy the victory.”\footnote{PC, 229 / SVI XII, 210.} Now the situation changed completely and “the con-
ditions of existence [Tilværelses-Forholdene] for being a Christian” were turned upside down. Anti-Climacus describes the result that followed from the inversion:

There where, if I lived in a Church militant, suffering would come, now comes reward; there where, if I lived in a Church militant, insult and ridicule would assail me, honor and esteem beckon me; there where death would be unavoidable, I now celebrate the supreme triumph. Since I am living among none but Christians (according to the assumption), they are bound to recognize my genuinely Christian mentality at once and as a consequence rush toward me with honors and distinctions instead of opposing me...

This is the situation in the Church triumphant, where it pays most to be a Christian and the only thing that does not pay is not to be a Christian.\(^{1505}\)

Part of the Church triumphant was also a clear and directly recognizable “distinction of order” (Stands-Forskjel) along with the idea that those of a particular order, the members of the clergy, were the “real Christians.” These were appointed the task to express what it means to be a Christian, and the majority of Christians, “content with perceiving themselves in the order that represented them,” supplied “an environment of admiration” for them.\(^ {1506}\)

This is the background for established Christendom, with which Anti-Climacus apparently refers to the Lutheran countries, where state and the Church have become one. As a reaction to the illusion of the Church triumphant, established Christendom prefers silent admiration and adoration in the hidden inwardness for the external glory and direct recognizability. For the reformers of the Renaissance era the falseness of the victorious externality and its distance from original militant Christianity had become too blatant to be put up with anymore. Thus, they introduced a new con-

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\(^{1505}\) PC, 213–214 / SVI XII, 196.

\(^{1506}\) PC, 214 / SVI XII, 197.
ception of what it is to be a true Christian. They taught that “the true Christian that I am is something by itself, something for myself, something I am in hidden inwardness.” And why this hiddenness? Because I am afraid of the possible reward, of the possible esteem and honor, and I am “too truly Christian for that.”

However, what in practice followed from this reformation was as distant from the Church militant as the Church triumphant had been. Whereas in the early Church it had been pious to confess Christianity, in the established Christianity it now became pious to conceal Christianity. Being a Christian was relegated to inwardness and all were assumed to be Christians—in their hidden inwardness. Since no one presumed to be a knower of hearts, no one dared to use authority anymore. Instead, it was considered as given that everyone who had been baptized and confirmed is a Christian in his hidden inwardness. As a result of this, claims Anti-Climacus, there now lives in established Christendom “a pampered, proud and yet cowardly, defiant and yet spineless generation” that is ready to accept Christianity only on the condition that someone defends Christianity for them in a convincing way. In the course of time, namely, there appeared in Christendom free thinkers and men of that spirit who attacked, ridiculed, and mocked Christianity worse than the worst pagan mockers had done,” explains Anti-Climacus. In order to defend Christianity against these, in order to “get Christendom to show at least some sympathy with Christianity,” it seems that it is now necessary to make use of art (the arts of the sculptor, orator, and poet) or philosophy (that makes Christianity into something extraordinary "profound"). The problem with this is, however, that

1507 PC, 214 and 216 / SVI XII, 196 and 198–199.
1508 PC, 215–218 / SVI XII, 198–201.
1510 PC, 230–231 / SVI XII, 210–212.
1511 PC, 253 / SVI XII, 231.
by means of art and philosophy one is able, at best, to win admirers for Christianity, but detached admiration of the lofty idealizations still does not equal Christianity, it equals paganism.\textsuperscript{1512}

Established Christendom prefers the silent \textit{admiration} (Beundring) and \textit{adoration} (Tilbedelse) for the imitation of Christ. Against this Anti-Climacus claims that Jesus Christ, who said that he is the Way and the Life, did not come to the world to be served, admired, and worshiped. He asked only for \textit{imitators} (Efterfølgere) that would follow him and be like him.\textsuperscript{1513} While admiration and adoration correlate with loftiness (the pagan conception of the divine), imitation correlates with abasement. It is impossible to imitate something or someone that stands completely above us, so that it is once and for all beyond our means to come to resemble him. In such a case admiration is the only proper attitude, because otherwise one falls into envy and the desire to own something that does not properly belong to oneself. “Therefore I must in this situation renounce wanting myself to be that which is admired, for as Scripture says: You shall not covet, you shall not covet that which is denied to you,” writes Anti-Climacus.\textsuperscript{1514} But he points out that it is not the lofty God, but the abased Christ that uses the expression “imitators.” Furthermore, Anti-Climacus claims that when he uses the expression “disciple” (Disciple) it is clear that “imitator” is at the same time implied in it; Christ seeks “not just adherents of a teaching but imitators of a life.” Because he did not seek just admirers, he himself chose lowliness and abasement in order to be unconditionally behind all people and to propel them

\textsuperscript{1512} PC, 256–257 / SV\textsuperscript{I} XII, 234–235.  
\textsuperscript{1513} PC, 233 / SV\textsuperscript{I} XII, 213. Cf. Mt 10:38, 16:24; 1 Cor 11:1; Eph 5:1; and 1 Pet 2:21.  
\textsuperscript{1514} PC, 237 and 241 / SV\textsuperscript{I} XII, 217 and 220–221.
forward. Hence, it is a lie, it is “sin to want to admire in relation to Christ...instead of imitating him.”

The difference in emphasis with what Climacus wrote in Postscript is clear enough. In Postscript Climacus championed humble adoration (Tilbedelse, worship) in the hidden inwardness, and judged the (direct) attempt to imitate Christ as “impudence, conceited pretense, presumption, and the like.” In Practice in Christianity Anti-Climacus emphasizes as strongly as possible that Christianity demands imitation, not just admiration and adoration in the hidden inwardness. By this Anti-Climacus does not mean that admiration of the lofty does not belong to the Christian life at all. It does, and the imitator is also an admirer—as we saw he is in fact motivated to imitate by his admiration.

According to Anti-Climacus, the decisive difference between admirer and imitator is that, while the imitator strives to be what he admires, the admirer, personally detached, only admires. Anti-Climacus claims that the life of Christ clearly brought to light the difference between admirers and imitators. In the situation of contemporaneity it became clear that, for example, Judas Iscariot and Nicodemus were just admirers, not imitators. But can there still be such a clear cut difference between admirers and imitators in modern Christendom? Has not the desire to imitate Christ the way the first Christians did become rather quixotic now that all are, at least nominally, Christians, and the danger of actuality that was bound up with being a Christian has been removed?

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1516 PC, 243 / SVI XII, 222.
1517 CUP, 413 and 532 n.1 / SVI VII, 358–359 and 464 n.1.
1518 CUP, 412 / SVI VII, 357.
1519 PC, 241 / SVI XII, 220.
1520 PC, 245–250 / SVI XII, 224–228.
1521 PC, 250–251 / SVI XII, 229.
Here we again have the same objection we met earlier, and the answer that Anti-Climacus gives to it is again the same: the single individual should take first of all care for his own part—then he will find out whether he will or will not experience something similar to what the first Christians did in the actual world. Let us suppose that there is no danger in confessing devotion to Christ anymore. The difference between “striving to be what one admires” and “being personally detached” still remains, claims Anti-Climacus. He explains:

Does not Christian teaching about ethics and obligation, Christianity’s requirement to die to the world, to surrender the earthly, its requirement of self-denial, does this not contain enough requirements—if they were to be obeyed—to produce the danger of actuality that makes manifest the difference between an admirer and an imitator, makes it manifest precisely in this way, that the imitator has his life in these dangers and the admirer personally remains detached although they both are nevertheless united in acknowledging in words the truth of Christianity? Thus the difference still remains. The admirer will make no sacrifices, renounce nothing, give up nothing earthly, will not transform his life, will not be what is admired, will not let his life express it—but in words, phrases, assurances he is inexhaustible about how highly he prizes Christianity. The imitator, however, aspires to be what is admired—and then, remarkably enough, even though he is living in “established Christendom,” the same danger results for him as once was bound up with confessing Christ.¹⁵²

Anti-Climacus claims here that the Christian ethics of self-denial stands so much in contradiction with the morals prevailing in Christendom that he who lives up to it will stand in the same danger of suffering and persecution in Christendom as the first Christians did in paganism. Apparently, the view is based partly on per-

¹⁵² *PC*, 251–252 / *SV I* XII, 230.
sonal experience and observation of life, and partly on a total-
ity-view of the world and on the idea of life as a test. Anti-
Climacus admits that if the majority of human beings would be-
come true Christians, i.e. imitators of Christ, then the possibility
of Christian self-denial would, indeed, disappear. But, he assures
us, this will never happen, since in essential respects the world will
never change: “The world is going neither forward nor backward;
it remains essentially the same, like the sea, like the air, in short,
like an element. It is, namely, and must be the element that can
provide the test of being a Christian, who in this world is always a
member of the Church militant.”

But if this is really the case, if in this world truly to be a Chris-
tian will always mean to be the abased one, “suffering every possi-
ble evil, every mockery and insult, and finally to be punished as a
criminal,” if the true followers of Christ will always be “persec-
cuted, cast out from society, and finally put to death” (cf. John
16:1), then what reason would any human being have to be-
come and to be a Christian? Is not Christianity, then, so misan-
thropic that it is quite justified to call Christians odium totius
generis humani [haters of the human race] as the early Christians
were called, asks Anti-Climacus.

1524 PC, 232 / SVI XII, 212. On the other hand, Anti-Climacus writes that
“God wants to be involved...wants to have a little bit of control of the world’s
development, or he wants to keep the human race developing.” Therefore a
“gadfly” like Socrates is justified in giving a hard time to the established order.
(PC, 88 / SVI XII, 84.) Hence, it is not the idea of Anti-Climacus that we
should give up trying to make the world better, even if it is his conviction that
world will never become better. The combination amounts to the Socratic
enthusiasm that acts without the illusion of achieving something in this world.
(Kresten Nordentoft gives a lucid analysis on this in Nordentoft 1973, 238–
243.)
1525 PC, 106 and 115–116 / SVI XII, 102 and 109–110.
1526 PC, 117 / SVI XII, 111.
Anti-Climacus admits that from the point of view of the natural man, i.e. from the point of view of pagans and so-called “Christians,” it certainly is justified: there is all the reason in the world to become offended at Christianity and even to persecute Christians. However, a Christian sees the issue from a different perspective. First of all, as noticed above, from his point of view it is not Christianity but the world that is cruel. Second, when he chooses to believe and to hold on to Christ, he believes that he chooses the absolute good. He chooses Christ and follows him in order to escape the sickness unto death, the eternal perdition, and in order to enter into life, into an eternal happiness. Anti-Climacus writes: “The relative is, namely, to designate within temporality a time for reward for work; the absolute is solely to choose eternity...The believer views his whole life as the natural man views some years of his life. The natural man resigns himself to suffering for some years—in order then to harvest the reward; the believer commits his entire life in time.” Thus, there is no “why” that the human understanding could accept for sacrificing one’s whole life in following Christ, but there is the infinite “why” that exists for faith.

From the point of view of the Christian, Christianity is the absolute, and all depends on obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ in the situation of contemporaneity. It is out of love that God became a man, but it is still God who became a man. When out of love God wills to transform human beings into likenesses of himself, it is impudence to ask humanly about “why and wherefore Christianity came into the world.” Because there is an infinite difference between God and man, to be transformed into likeness with God is humanly speaking, in a relative sense, the greatest

1527 PC, 116 / SVI XII, 110.
1528 PC, 196 / SVI XII, 181–182.
1530 PC, 119–120 / SVI XII, 113.
torment. Anti-Climacus writes: “In all the flat, lethargic, dull moments, when the sensate dominates a person, to him Christianity is a madness because it is incommensurate with any finite wherefore. But then what good is it? Answer: Be quiet, it is the absolute.” Christianity is the absolute, and therefore “all the relativities people have hit upon about why and wherefore are untruth.”

But is this not too rigorous? And is the writer himself able to live through in the historical actuality what he outlines in his writing? Anti-Climacus admits that perhaps he is not, but maintains that even if he himself should sink under the weight of the criterion he develops, he cannot help but develop it. His point is that if Christianity is not “the unconditioned” (det Ubetingede), it is abolished. Either one takes Christianity as the absolute and has absolute, unconditional obedience to it, or one may as well forget it. Christianity must be reinstated in its rights as sovereign by rigorousness, for “if there is only one rescue for us, Christianity, then there truly is only one possible rescue for Christianity: rigorousness.” Only rigorousness helps. Anti-Climacus explains that this is the understanding he has gained as he has lived as a striving Christian among “Christians” and spied on incognito as a frivolous person close at hand to them. “Through this life in the human throng,” he says he has learned “with frightful veracity to understand that rigorousness is the only thing that can help.” Part of this understanding is no doubt the insight into human psychology that Anti-Climacus presents in The Sickness unto Death: the insight that, despite appearances, practically all human individuals live in despair. But the other part is the insight into the general state of affairs in established Christendom, the insight into

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1533 PC, 228–229 / SV I XII, 209.
the social and historical situation of individuals. In established Christendom, writes Anti-Climacus, no one dares to exercise dominion over people with divine authority anymore and to present Christianity as the unconditioned. As a result the pathological psychological cases—the spiritless, cowardly, and defiant forms of despair that Anti-Climacus described and analyzed in *The Sickness unto Death*—begin to flourish, and now in established Christendom there lives “a pampered, proud and yet cowardly, defiant and yet spineless generation.”

But if Governance takes care of us and brings us up through historical actuality, how can such a state of affairs come into being? If God is the omnipotent one, why does he let all this corruption and impudence take place and go on unpunished? He does not, claims Anti-Climacus, for this wretched state of affairs is in itself the most terrible punishment. He writes: “If you, when you see a drunkard, when you see him in all his wretchedness, ignominy, and misery, can see the righteous God, then you must—if you have been granted the grace that you were rigorously brought up in Christianity—you must see the righteous God in ‘established Christendom.’”

From this point of view, all the rigorousness that Anti-Climacus is able to conjure up is, in fact, an expression of neighborly love that wants to “build up” (*at opbygge*), an expression of concern (*Bekymring*) that a physician with insight has for his fellow beings. In a critical situation where the patient is about to perish, rigorousness equals leniency and becomes a means of salvation—just as the apparent leniency and indifference of God equals rigorousness and the most terrible punishment.

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1534 *PC*, 230–231 / *SV1* XII, 210–211.
1535 *PC*, 231–232 / *SV1* XII, 212.
However, Anti-Climacus writes that he is a solitary and a, “in the worldly sense, most powerless person,” who does not want to rule by worldly power, but only wants “to serve the truth.”\(^{1537}\) In accordance with this, he respects the sovereignty of his reader. At the end of Part III of *Practice in Christianity*, he states that it is left to the reader “how, with regard to inward deepening, he will apply to himself what is read.”\(^{1538}\) He explains that the rigorousness of the requirements he presents drives ultimately only at confession of sin and humble acceptance of grace:

“And what does all this mean?” It means that each individual in quiet inwardness before God is to humble himself under what it means in the strictest sense to be a Christian, is to confess honestly before God where he is so that he still might worthily accept the grace that is offered to every imperfect person—that is, to everyone. And then nothing further; then, as for the rest, let him do his work and rejoice in it, love his wife and rejoice in her, joyfully bring up his children, love his fellow beings, rejoice in life. If anything more is required of him, God will surely let him understand and in that case will also help him further, for in the terrible language of the Law it indeed sounds so terrible, because it seems as if it were the individual himself who by his own power is to hold to Christ, rather than, in the language of love, that it is Christ who holds on to him.\(^{1539}\)

In other words, if Judge William and those akin to him only confess, in their inwardness before God, how far they fall short of the ideal, that is enough; then they may lead their happy and harmonious life. If Governance and the love of Christ draw them further, that is no longer the concern of the one who witnesses for the truth; then it is love in their inwardness that draws them further. Here, too, Anti-Climacus takes into consideration his posi-

\(^{1537}\) *PC*, 229 / *SV1* XII, 209.

\(^{1538}\) *PC*, 260 / *SV1* XII, 237.

\(^{1539}\) *PC*, 67 / *SV1* XII, 64.
tion, his situatedness in the historical actuality and respects the sovereignty and freedom of the other subjects to situate themselves in the historical actuality. He does not drive at a mechanical, external imitation of Christ, but at “awakening and inward deepening.” In this he is in agreement with Climacus in *Postscript* and with Kierkegaard, who in the “Editor’s Preface” states that the requirement should be presented and heard in its ideality, “so that I might learn not only to resort to grace but to resort to it in relation to the use of grace.” In other words, so that I would resort to grace in the right spirit and not take it in vain. Despite the rigorousness and the polemical character of the presentation of the ideal, there is no attempt to force anyone, or to usurp the power and authority of the ecclesiastical authorities.

In accordance with the preface, the book ends on a conciliatory note. In the *concluding prayer* Anti-Climacus has recourse to the omnipotence and wisdom of the Lord Jesus Christ as he prays that Christ will draw us wholly to himself. At the same time he takes into account the multiplicity and relativity of human situations in finitude and temporality.

Anti-Climacus testifies that Christ has many ways and everywhere is a way that leads to him. He draws “no one to an unworthy distance from dangers,” but neither does he draw “anyone out into foolhardy ventures.” Thus, Anti-Climacus prays to Christ that he would draw us wholly to himself, “whether we shall ‘seek honor in living quietly’ (1 Thessalonians 4:11) or, struggling, in abasement.” He prays to him for the little infant to be baptized, for the youth to be confirmed, for the bride and bridegroom to be married, for the husband and wife who are fulfilling their vocations, and for the elderly person alike. And he prays for the happy and for the sufferer, for the convert and for the one that is in need.

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1540 See the subtitle of Part I, *PC*, 5 / *SVI* XII, 0.
1541 *PC*, 7 / *SVI* XII, xv.
of conversion.\textsuperscript{1542} Finally, Anti-Climacus prays both for the clergy and laymen:

> We pray for those who are servants of the Word, those whose task it is, as far as a human being is capable of it, to draw people to you. We pray that you will bless their task, but also that in this task of theirs they themselves may be drawn to you, that in their zeal to draw others to you they themselves are not held back from you. And we pray for the lay Christians, that they, themselves drawn to you, may not think poorly of themselves, as if it were not allotted to them also to draw others to you as far as a human being is capable of it.

> As far as a human being is capable of it—for indeed you are the only one who is capable of drawing to yourself, even if you are able to use everything and every one to draw all to yourself.\textsuperscript{1545}

The message is clear. There is no direct criticism of the ecclesiastical establishment, but instead there is a prayer for it. At the same time Anti-Climacus still claims that every human being alike falls under the requirements of the Christian ideal and needs to be drawn to Christ: would that those who have an apostolic mission were also drawn to imitate Christ in their personal life!

It is also noteworthy that here at the end of \textit{Practice in Christianity} the dividing line between the clergy and laymen just about fades away. There is no longer a clear, once-and-for-all difference between the two groups as there was in \textit{Postscript}. The state of affairs is again more as it was in \textit{Philosophical Fragments}: any and every human being may serve (only) as an occasion, i.e. as a means for the God-man to draw human beings to himself; there are no “second hand” disciples.

\textsuperscript{1542} \textit{PC}, 260–262 / \textit{SV} I XII, 237–238.

\textsuperscript{1543} \textit{PC}, 262 / \textit{SV} I XII, 238–239.
7.3 Infinite Enjoyment—Suffering until the End

Read together, the two works by Anti-Climacus provide a comprehensive overview on what it is to live poetically in the Christian way.

According to *The Sickness unto Death*, the modern, enlightened and spiritless age is characterized by an illusory sense of security that conceals an unconscious despair. To that extent it is a good thing if the individual falls in despair, loses his sense of security, and becomes conscious of his hidden despair, for this may eventually lead him to faith. If the individual does not become “inclosed” in his despair, but accepts faith, he will be awakened from the dead state of spiritlessness and he may again relate to the infinite and eternal in his finite and temporal existence as he was originally meant to.

According to *Practice in Christianity*, what decides the salvation of the individual is whether he comes to encounter Christ in the situation of contemporaneity and whether, in this situation, he becomes offended at Christ or chooses to believe in him. In the situation of contemporaneity, the propensity to become offended is, however, much greater than what is generally realized in modern, spiritless Christendom. As *The Sickness unto Death* underscores, because sin is in human beings as “a position,” becoming offended is the natural human reaction. Moreover, the message of Christianity (the accusation of sin and the forgiveness of sin) and Christ himself are incomprehensible for human understanding, and this gives rise to offense. Finally, according to both *The Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*, Christianity emphasizes the single individual in a way that appears indecent and scandalous to modern, commonsensical and conventional, understanding. The idea that God becomes a man for the salvation of human individuals, the Christian ethics that gives priority to individual conscience over all the instances of the universal, and the demand to imitate Christ as a single individual in the world that
persecutes the imitator just as it did the prototype—all this would certainly offend the modern bourgeois-philistine, were he not so spiritless that it all went unnoticed.

The possibility of offense becomes clear if in our impassioned imagination we consider Christ again as he must have appeared to his contemporaries and as he would appear to us, too, if we encountered him in the situation of contemporaneity. According to Anti-Climacus, one is able to receive a true impression of Christianity only in the context of a social situation that pertains to it, i.e. in the situation of contemporaneity with Christ. In order to break the spell of spiritlessness, to enliven the passion and imagination, and to reawaken the possibility of offense, without which there is no true faith, *Practice in Christianity* uses poetic means. It redramatizes Christ’s invitation and the human reactions to it in the situation of contemporaneity. Anti-Climacus depicts how God, who in the sinful world must always appear as abased, invites everyone and offers his help. His compassion is for everyone alike—in the situation of contemporaneity such compassion scandalizes all respectable people. His help is ultimately only spiritual help—in the situation of contemporaneity that scandalizes the respectable and the outcast alike. He is just a poor human being, but he claims to be God who forgives sins—in the situation of contemporaneity that appears either ridiculous or outrageous.

In his *Journals and Papers* Kierkegaard argues that the use of poetic means to make people see again the risks and paradoxes involved in Christianity is quite legitimate. The poetic helps to grasp the absolute as “existing in the medium of actuality and in a form of a single human being who is like one of us.” With the help of poetic reflection the words and life of Christ again become a commentary on us.\(^\text{1544}\) The poetic and situational elements, thus, already play a decisive role at the beginning of Christian life, when

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\(^{1544}\) *JP 6, 6368 / Pap. X 1 A 163.*
the decision to choose Christ is made in the situation of contemporaneity. The same holds true in the realization of Christian life that follows. Both *The Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity* present Christian life as a form of living poetically that unfolds itself in the historically given social actuality.

*The Sickness unto Death* posits the ideal life as a constant synthesis of infinitude with finitude and possibility with necessity. In this synthesis imagination plays the key role. If a person has imagination together with faith, he is able to breathe even in the middle of the worst misfortunes that he might encounter in finitude. At the same time, the individual must have control and obedience, so that he does not get lost in infinite possibilities, but lives a full life in the actuality in which he has his place. According to *The Sickness unto Death*, life in faith involves obedience to God in the middle of the given historical and social actuality. Faith is an active state of the self—to use the terminology of Vigilius Haufniensis, “a unity of state and transition”\(^{1545}\)—in which the single individual is grounded transparently in God. Faith does not just involve a correct conception of God and of oneself, it involves both obedient inner activity within oneself and obedient external activity in the world. Faith implies a totality of life, in which the single individual obeys God by imitating Christ and assumes the role of a lowly servant in the historically given social actuality. This obedience to God and imitation of Christ Anti-Climacus also presents in *The Sickness unto Death* as his solution to the social and political problems of the times. Instead of becoming members of “the crowd,” human individuals should remain true to their conscience and obey God as single individuals.

The views of Anti-Climacus become further articulated and receive more content in *Practice in Christianity*. Here Anti-Climacus describes what the imitation of Christ must involve in

\(^{1545}\) *CA*, 113 / *SVI* IV, 381.
the given, sinful world. For a Christian the abased Christ is the absolute *telos* that draws him to suffer in his life for the sake of the good. At first the image of perfection exists only for the passionate admiration and adoration in the imagination of the person that dreams to become a Christian. But if the person has the will to remain true to this ideal in the middle of the historically given actuality within which he finds himself, he will be brought up step by step by Governance so that eventually he becomes one with the image. Through his abasement and suffering he comes to represent the ideal in the element of untruth, i.e. in the world.

It might seem that the prospect of imitating the suffering Christ no longer exists in Christendom, where Christianity has gained the upper hand and received an official and esteemed position. Anti-Climacus argues in *Practice in Christianity*, however, that this is just an illusion. He claims that if the individual actually begins to imitate Christ in his own life and puts into practice his teaching, i.e. the Christian ethics of self-denial, he will certainly be brought up through suffering and persecution even in the modern world. The truth “as a way” still exists as a live option in as much as the Christian truth may never be established in the world “as a result.” The triumphant Church and the established Church do not really exist here in the world. They are just illusions, inventions that leave the actual world to the devil, while they make people imagine that they are Christians living in Christian countries. The truth is that the Christian truth is actualized in the world only in and through the lives of single individuals, who in the historically given social actuality are bound to suffer as they serve Christ instead of the world.

We may now compare the view Anti-Climacus gives of the ideal Christian life with the Christian ideal of living poetically that Magister Kierkegaard outlined in *The Concept of Irony*. How do these two views, the one presented before the beginning of the
pseudonymous authorship and the other at the end of it, correspond with each other?

Quite in accordance with the ideal of living poetically, Anti-Climacus posits for the Christian the task of letting the eternal and the infinite become present in temporality and finitude. The task of the Christian is to let God bring him up while he fulfills his purpose in the given actuality. More specifically, his task is to actualize in his own life the timeless ideal posited by the life of Christ. In this upbringing, poetic elements such as imagination, passion, and the will to accept Christ’s help and imitate his example, play the key role. According to Anti-Climacus the individual must keep hold of these, instead of relying on abstract reflection and prudent calculation. The ideal Anti-Climacus presents is also characterized by imprudence and the conscious neglect of reason that distinguishes it from the calculating and reasonable bourgeois and philosophical models of life. In the language of The Concept of Irony, we may state, then, that the Christian ideal of Anti-Climacus is that of “living poetically” and the task he posits to the Christian is to “let oneself be poetically composed.” Both Magister Kierkegaard and Anti-Climacus regard the life of the Christian as “an upbringing, an education, which...is specifically supposed to develop the seeds God himself has placed in man.” According to both, “the Christian knows himself as the person that has reality for God.”

According to both, the Christian who lets himself be poetically composed also has “a definite given context into which he has to fit” so that he “does not become a word without meaning.” According to both, the individual needs imagination, ethical will, and religious passion in order to live poetically, that is, in order to live infinitely in the given actuality.

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1546 CI, 280 / SV VII XIII, 352. (Translation slightly altered.)
1547 See CI, 283 / SV VII XIII, 354.
Climacus clearly seems to represent the Christian ideal of living poetically coined by Magister Kierkegaard in his dissertation.

But, one may still ask, is there not also an all too clear divergence between the two authors. In his dissertation Magister Kierkegaard outlines the religious life, and by implication also the Christian life, as a life of religious enjoyment, in which the subject—reconciled with the actuality in which he is living and absolutely transparent to himself—reaches the highest enjoyment and enjoys himself in truth. But how is it with the Christian life according to Anti-Climacus? Is there not just suffering—and more suffering and more intense suffering—until the very end? Is there any prospect of reconciliation with actuality and are there any signs of infinite enjoyment in his texts?

In fact, there is and there are. Appealing to the Lord Jesus Christ in his concluding prayer of Practice in Christianity, Anti-Climacus opens up the prospect of Christian reconciliation that builds up the relationship to the historically given social actuality and to other Christians in it. Anti-Climacus lists various sacramental occasions and various kinds of human beings and for them all prays to Christ, who called himself “the way” and who for that very reason, has “many ways, more than the stars in the sky, and everywhere a way, a way that leads to the way.” Thus, there is a prospect of reconciliation, the cornerstone of the reconciliation being Christ himself, who draws all the individuals to himself wherever they find themselves.

The prospect of infinite religious enjoyment is also maintained by Anti-Climacus. At the end of Part I of Practice in Christianity, in the passage already quoted above that explains the moral of the presentation of the Christian ideal, Anti-Climacus writes that

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each individual is expected to humble himself before the ideal and then accept the grace. Then he may rejoice in his life as he pleases. Fundamentally, it is not law, i.e. the ideal posited by Christ, which draws human beings; it is his love and grace. This acceptance of the grace and rejoicing in one's life that follows it, is arguably the very same infinite religious enjoyment of which Magister Kierkegaard wrote.

The presence of infinite joy and bliss in Christian existence is also confirmed by the Christian writings Kierkegaard published in his own name. If we read Kierkegaard’s Christian discourses from “The Gospel of Sufferings” (1847) onwards, we find that they share with Practice in Christianity the view that Christianity is in conflict both with “the world” and with what is “natural” for human beings. The discourses represent well the Christian ethics of self-denial that goes against the world and against sinful human nature and that, according to Practice in Christianity, will inevitably bring suffering and persecution to its practitioners in the given historical world. However, these texts assure their readers that in the middle of suffering, there is joy. There is a strong sense of eternal health in these texts that seems to derive precisely from the prospect of holding out and overcoming the limitations pertaining to this finite and temporal world.

Thus, in the inwardness of the Christian, there still seems to be “infinite enjoyment” in the midst of this sinful world. Without the presence or, at least, the promise of such enjoyment, it would indeed be difficult to see why any human being would become and remain attracted to Christianity. But now there is a reason to hold onto Christianity in one’s life, because it lets the individual enjoy (at least the prospect of) an eternal and infinite blessedness here,

\[1551\] See PC, 67 / SVI XII, 64, and confer with the “Editor’s Preface” in PC, 7 / SVI XII, xv.

\[1552\] For detailed analyses of Kierkegaard’s Christian discourses, see, for example, Kirmmse 1990, Ferreira 2001, and Walsh 2005.
already, in the middle of finitude. In other words, although madness from the point of view of worldly sagacity, it is in a sense rational to live Christianly in as much as it is a genuine form of “living poetically.”

With his criticism of both the triumphant Church and the established Church, Anti-Climacus already appears to be on the same collision course with the Church that Kierkegaard was in his “attack on Christendom” in 1854–1855. In one passage of Practice in Christianity Anti-Climacus even goes so far as to claim that established Christendom fulfills a plan of Satan himself in that it forbids turning Christian inwardness into external action. However, both Anti-Climacus and the editor of the book, Kierkegaard, emphasize that this criticism does not aim at a mutiny in the external world, but at “awakening and inward deepening.” The goal is just that each individual would learn to resort to grace in the right way, “in quiet inwardness before God.” There is not yet any direct criticism of ecclesiastical authority but instead, at the end of the book, a prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ for the clergy and laymen alike, that they would be drawn to Christ and draw also others to him “as far as a human being is capable of it.”  

Later, in retrospect, in On My Work as an Author, Kierkegaard maintains that no one was judged in Practice in Christianity, except he himself, who in his “Editor’s Preface” confessed that he falls short of the ideal and, in consequence, must resort to grace. Here Kierkegaard writes that the significance of the pseudonym Anti-Climacus is that in him the authorship comes to a halt. In and through Anti-Climacus “something higher is shown, which simply forces me back within my boundary, judging me, that my

\[1553\] See PC, 7, 67, and 262 / SV1 XII, xv, 64, and 238–239.  
\[1554\] PV, 15 / SV1 XIII, 505.
life does not meet so high a requirement and that consequently the communication is something poetical.”

Kierkegaard explains further that his role in Christendom is neither to judge and use authority, nor to revolt against authorities. His role is that of “a genius.” As a layman genius, as a religious author, he is without apostolic authority. Accordingly, he aims with his authorship only “to make aware of the essentially Christian.” In Christendom he champions the Socratic position of “the single individual” and does not want to attack the government together with “the crowd.” On the contrary, in contrast and in opposition to the revolting crowd, he desires that there is “government,” that there is “governing by those who are officially appointed and called,” and “that fearing God they might stand firm.” He wants only to provide “a corrective” within the established order, not to subvert it. Hence, the book Practice in Christianity should not be understood as a revolt against the established order, but as its potential defense if it understands itself correctly: “Provided an ecclesiastical established order understands itself, it will to the same degree understand the latest book, Practice in Christianity, as an attempt to find, ideally, a basis for an established order.”

These statements in On My Work as an Author manifest Kierkegaard’s keen consideration of his own position in the given historical and social actuality. He thinks of his work as an author as an action that must take its context into account in order to be meaningful and appropriate. In the last chapter of our exegesis, we shall investigate how Kierkegaard situated his work as an author into his historical and social context. I will try to show that the ideal of living poetically is Kierkegaard’s key to understanding his life and his work as an author.

1555 PV, 6 n / SVI XIII, 494 n.
1556 Ibid.
1557 PV, 18 / SVI XIII, 507.
Kierkegaard published his first official explanation of his work as an author in the epilogue of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* entitled “A First and Last Explanation.” This explanation we have already considered in chapter 6 above: we noticed how in the last two pages of the epilogue Kierkegaard expressed his gratitude to Governance and to his father, and his respect for “the established order” and for “the old familiar text handed down from the fathers.”

As may be seen from the title, Kierkegaard meant this statement in *Postscript* to be his last statement. From his journals we know that he was planning to give up writing and to become a humble part of the ecclesiastical established order himself: his plan was to take to the country as a rural pastor.\(^{1558}\) But apparently that was not how it was meant to be. In December 1845 he had attacked the magazine *Corsaren* (*Corsair*), which specialized in ridiculing the good citizens of Copenhagen, and the consequences of the attack directed him back to writing. The constant assaults in the pages of *Corsaren* and the “mob persecution” that took place not only on the streets of Copenhagen, but also on solitary paths out in the woods and occasionally even in the pews,\(^{1559}\) convinced Kierkegaard that he should not desert his post but continue his work as a religious author.\(^{1560}\) In the following years Kierkegaard produced not only several collections of rigorous and uncompro-

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\(^{1558}\) See JP 5, 5873 and 5966 / Pap. VII 1 A 4 and 229.

\(^{1559}\) See JP 5, 5887, 5998 and 6105 / Pap. VII 1 A 98, Pap. VIII 1 A 99 and 544.

\(^{1560}\) See JP 5, 5961 / Pap. VII 1 A 221 and JP 6, 6157 / Pap. IX A 54.
mising Christian discourses and the Christian treatises signed by Anti-Climacus, but also new analyses and explanations of his work as an author. Of these he published only On My Work as an Author (Om min Forfatter-Virksomhed, 1851). The other texts came out after his death. Kierkegaard’s brother Peter Christian Kierkegaard published The Point of View for My Work as an Author (Synspunktet for min Forfatter-Virksomhed, 1859) together with the appendix “The Single Individual” (“Den Enkelte”. Tvende “Noter” betreffende min Forfatter-Virksomhed). Later, in the collections of Kierkegaard’s journals and papers has appeared also the text Armed Neutrality (“Den Bevæbnede Neutralitet” eller min Position som christelig Forfatter i Christenheden).

These texts are complementary and in the following exegesis they will be investigated together. The purpose of the exegesis of these texts is to show that Kierkegaard also saw his own life in the light of his ideal of living poetically. Besides these texts we shall also investigate Two Ages (En litterair Anmeldelse, 1846), which clarifies the (anti)political policy that informed Kierkegaard’s work as an author.\footnote{For interesting, pious and critical, points of view to Kierkegaard’s autobiographical texts, see Cappelørn 1982 and Garff 1995, 298–330 (in English, Garff 1991). In studying Two Ages I have consulted Kirmmse 1990, 265–278.}

8.1 Becoming Brought up while Fulfilling a Calling

In the Introduction above we investigated the passages of The Concept of Irony, in which Kierkegaard formulated his ideal of living poetically in contrast to the ideal of the Romantic ironists. As a result, we arrived at a two-part characterization of Kierkegaard’s notion of living poetically: for Kierkegaard living poetically means

- becoming brought up by God, while
– assuming ethical-religiously one’s place and role in the historical actuality.

*On My Work as an Author* brings into prominence both of these aspects as characteristics of Kierkegaard’s own life as an author. In the beginning of the book Kierkegaard describes being an author as a calling, through which one aspires to find one’s place in the given actuality:

> When a country is little...[t]o be an author...is about the poorest paid, the least secure, and just about the most thankless job there is. If there is some individual who has capacity of being an author and if he is also fortunate enough to have private means, then he becomes an author more or less on his own expense...In that way the individual in his work will love his idea, the nation to which he belongs, the cause he serves, the language he as an author has honor to write.\textsuperscript{1562}

At the end of the book Kierkegaard acknowledges his debt to Governance and testifies that for him personally the authorship has meant upbringing:

> [P]ersonally, one thing absorbs me unconditionally, is more important to me and lies more upon my heart than the whole authorship: to express as honestly and strongly as possible something for which I can never adequately give thanks... —how infinitely much more Governance has done for me than I had ever expected, could have expected, or dared to have expected...

> “Before God,” religiously, when I speak with myself, I call my whole work as an author my own upbringing and development... \textsuperscript{1563}

In *On My Work as an Author* and *The Point of View* we find a rich description of both what it is to fulfill a calling in a given historical situation and what is implied in being brought up by God. We shall investigate, first, how Kierkegaard through his calling

\textsuperscript{1562} *PV*, 5 / *SV* XIII, 493.
\textsuperscript{1563} *PV*, 12 / *SV* XIII, 500–501.
assumes his place in the world and, second, how he was being brought up by Governance in and through fulfilling his calling. In the following we shall consider how Kierkegaard describes his work and life, and not critically evaluate whether the description is true. In other words, we are not interested in the empirical historical facts, in “how it really was with the life of Kierkegaard,” but in understanding the ethical-religious ideal and its significance for Kierkegaard’s self-understanding.  

8.1.1 Fulfilling a Calling

The ideal expressed in the quotation above, that the individual in his work loves “his idea, the nation to which he belongs, the cause he serves, the language he as an author has honor to write,” closely resembles Judge William’s description of his ethical life in Either/Or. Like the judge, Kierkegaard considers his work as a duty and as a calling, in which he is to make the best use of his particular resources, of his special talents and his previous life-development, in serving his fellow beings. In Armed Neutrality Kierkegaard explains that his special gift is that he knows “with uncommon clarity and definiteness” what it means to be a Christian and also has “to an unusual degree...the qualifications to be able to present it.” Because he thinks that the ideal picture of be-

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1564 The ultimate interest in this investigation is to uncover Kierkegaard’s ideal of how we should live in the world (the ideal of living poetically) in order to bring it into dialogue with the ideal that arguably dominates modern world (the ideal of living reasonably). From the point of view of the biographical question, whether Kierkegaard himself as a historical person attained his in his actual life is not important. It falls outside the scope of the discussion. For different versions of “how it really was with the life of Kierkegaard”, see Lowrie 1938, Hohlenberg 1940, Garff 2000, and Hannay 2001.

ing a Christian has been forgotten in his times, he considers it as his duty to present it again. Kierkegaard writes:

I...think it is my duty to do it, simply because it seems to be forgotten in Christendom...I think it is my duty to Christianity, my duty to what has been passed on from the fathers and was also entrusted to me by a father, whose upbringing is in large part my efficacy. In this regard I am also frequently reminded of the teachers of my childhood and youth...I believe it is my clearly understood duty to do this, because a person so rigorously brought up in Christianity will soon be a great rarity.\(^\text{1566}\)

The general form of a dutiful life is the same here as it was in *Either/Or*. Just like Kierkegaard, Judge William also refers to his childhood experiences at home and school as formative to his dutiful character, and, just like Kierkegaard, he has assumed a calling that he believes to suit his capabilities and that demands all his capacities.\(^\text{1567}\)

However, there is also a clear difference in how Judge William and Kierkegaard relate to their contemporaries and to the totality of the world in which they live. The ethical judge has attained a solid position within the established order and he is in harmony with his compatriots. But, according to Kierkegaard, such harmony is an impossibility for a religious author. Kierkegaard writes that "every religious author is *eo ipso* [just by being that] polemical, because the world is not so good that the religious can be assumed to have triumphed or to be in the majority."\(^\text{1568}\) The evilness, or at least mediocrity,\(^\text{1569}\) of the given world is a basic axiom of a religious authorship, and from this axiom the religious author may safely develop a syllogism: "[W]hen asked whereby he demon-

\(^\text{1566}\) *PV*, 138 / *Pap*. X 5 B 107, pp. 297–298.

\(^\text{1567}\) See *EO2*, 266–270 / *SV1* II, 239–242.

\(^\text{1568}\) *PV*, 67 / *SV1* XIII, 553.

\(^\text{1569}\) See *PV*, 88 n / *SV1* XIII, 572 n.
strates he is right and that what he says is true, he answers, ‘I demonstrate it by this, that I am persecuted; it is truth, and I demonstrate it by this, that I am laughed to scorn.’” As a consequence of the axiom, the religious author must also acknowledge that, if he “is not present where the danger is and where the evil has its haunts, [he] is a deceiver.”

In The Point of View Kierkegaard assures us that he is and was a religious author, whose “whole authorship pertains to the issue: becoming a Christian, with direct and indirect polemical aim at that enormous illusion, Christendom.” In other words, the evil or mediocre world towards which Kierkegaard as a religious author was and is polemical is the world of Christendom. Christendom is, according to Kierkegaard, the illusion that in so-called Christian countries “all are Christians of sorts.” The illusion is that all these thousands and thousands, “of whom by far the great majority, according to everything that can be discerned, have their lives in entirely different categories,” call themselves Christians and perhaps delude themselves to thinking that they are Christians without being that at all.

In Armed Neutrality Kierkegaard specifies his claim that Christendom is an illusion. He explains that while Christianity still exists “as a teaching, as doctrine,” what has been forgotten is “being a Christian, what it means to be a Christian.” This is due to a triple confusion. First, Christendom is considered to be “an established order,” and in consequence all Christian qualifications receive “an unchristian, conciliatory perspective within the temporal.” However, the true Christian perspective is “polemical within or away from finitude toward the eternal.” Second, with the help of “science and scholarship” (Videnskab), the “dialectical” charac-

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1572 PV, 23 / SV I XIII, 518.
1573 PV, 8 n.2 and 41 / SV I XIII, 496 n.3 and 529–530.
ter of being a Christian is annulled and, consequently, forgotten. Actually, existence is determined by dialectical contradictions and “what speculative thought calls unity is first achieved in eternity, only momentarily in temporality.” Third, “[t]he medium for being a Christian has been shifted from existence and the ethical to the intellectual, the metaphysical, the imaginational.”

To interpret: In that objective science and scholarship consider Christianity only as a doctrine that describes the divine reality, it makes us forget our existence as temporal and sinful subjects. Thus, it makes us forget how hard it is for us in actual life to attain the ethical ideal and the paradoxical salvation posited by Christianity—how hard it is for an individual sinner in a sinful world to relate to and follow Christ in his own existence. At the same time, it is thought that just by belonging to the Church we are reconciled with God, and in countries with state churches every citizen belongs automatically to the Church. Ergo, all the personal striving, all the striving as a single individual, that might be thought to belong to being a Christian may now be safely forgotten—it is enough to realize the universal as a member of established Christendom.

It is against this illusion that Kierkegaard claims to have worked as an author. He explains that his diagnosis was that “Christendom has gone astray in reflection and sagacity.” Christendom is built on illusions created and constantly sustained by hard-headed reflection and sagacity. But against such opponents mere “immediate pathos” does not help, even if in immediate pathos “one were ready to sacrifice one’s life.” Since the illusions lie in the way people reflect and understand themselves, the occasional attempts by enthusiastic pastors and religious enthusiasts to remove the illusions through direct communication leave them untouched. The converters are simply branded as fanatics who do

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1574 PV, 129–130 / Pap. X 5 B 107, pp. 288–289. (Translation slightly altered.)
1575 See PV, 88 / SVI XIII, 573.
not realize that we all are already Christians inasmuch as we live in Christian countries. Therefore the situation “Christendom,” the situation which “casts everything in reflection,” must be taken into consideration in presenting the ideal of being a Christian, and that is what Kierkegaard claims he has done.

In *The Concept of Irony* it was claimed: “An individual who lets himself be poetically composed does have a definite given context into which he has to fit and thus does not become a word without meaning because it is wrenched out of its associations.” In *The Point of View* Kierkegaard considers it a special merit of his work as an author that in it the context has been carefully taken into consideration. He writes:

Here there is no vacillation, no ambiguity of the usual sort, that one does not know and cannot ascertain whether the situation is in paganism, whether the pastor in this sense is a missionary, or where one is. Here one does not lack what is usually lacking, a decisive categorical definition and a decisive expression for the situation: to proclaim Christianity—in Christendom. Everything is cast into reflection.

Kierkegaard explains that in the historically given social situation of Christendom, what is needed for becoming a Christian is “inwardness of reflection” or “the reflection of inward deepening.” But the individuals must simultaneously be made aware and wrested out of the delusions of reflection that keep them from true inward deepening. This has been Kierkegaard’s project, the Socratic project of reforming “the crowd” by addressing the single individuals that make it up. Imitating Socrates, Kierkegaard has

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1576 *PV*, 42–43 / *SV1* XIII, 531.
1577 *CI*, 283 / *SV1* XIII, 354. (Translation slightly altered.)
1578 *PV*, 56 / *SV1* XIII, 543.
practiced in his authorship the method of “indirect communication,” the maieutic method of making individuals aware. First, the delusions have been explicated so that individuals become aware that they are under them. This has been done through the pseudonyms in their aesthetic and philosophical writings. Second, but concurrently with the first, the truth is introduced side by side with the delusion so that the individual cannot help but become aware of it, and choose which of the two he prefers, the truth or the delusion. This has been done in the religious writings signed by Kierkegaard and addressed by him to “that single individual.”

But what about the danger and persecution that, according to Kierkegaard’s own statements quoted above, essentially pertain to being a religious author? Why would it fall inevitably to the lot of a religious author? Kierkegaard maintains that Socratic-Christian indirect communication is characterized by self-denial, by willingness to help and serve, by respect of the autonomy of the other subjects, and by love for the neighbor that does not aim to exclude anyone from salvation. But if all that is true, why would there be any danger involved in practicing such communication? Let me clarify the question. It is not hard to imagine that a severe pastor or Pietistic speaker that directly blames his listeners and makes uncompromising demands on them might become hated and even persecuted by many. The same holds true for the self-complacent orthodox believers that “band together in a little circle and strengthen one another in thinking

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1583 See PV, 44 / SV1 XIII, 532–533.
1584 PV, 45 / SV1 XIII, 533.
1585 See PV, 50 / SV1 XIII, 537–538.
1586 See PV, 47 / SV1 XIII, 535 together with PV, 20 / SV1 XIII, 509.
that they are the only Christians—and thus do not know anything else to do with all Christendom than to declare that they are not Christians.” ¹⁵⁸⁸ And the same is also true for “a fanatic,” who rushes forth, makes himself out to be the ideal Christian, and gathers around him followers and adherents who attach themselves directly to him. ¹⁵⁸⁹ Finally, the same holds, no doubt, for those, who in the name of Christianity aim at a “profane revolt,” for those who rebel against the secular rule and government in the name of the highest. ¹⁵⁹⁰ It is not hard to imagine that all these straightforward simpletons that directly challenge and threaten the normal life of the good “Christian” citizens will be opposed, and perhaps even persecuted, by their fellow citizens or by the representatives of the political and ecclesiastical establishment. But why would a humble, self-denying maieutician, who only aims at a silent reformation, ¹⁵⁹¹ who by reforming single individuals just wants to introduce Christianity again into Christendom so that everyone would in truth exist as Christians—why would he need to suffer persecution?

According to Kierkegaard, the reason is that the maieutic religious author causes serious trouble to people in that he compels them “to become aware and judge.” ¹⁵⁹² Furthermore, he challenges their ways of life and thinking not only through his books, but also through his action that is in contradiction with the normal custom and practice of the world. ¹⁵⁹³ Finally, because he serves another master, a religious maieutician does not bow to worldly powers, but defies both the omnipotence of tyrants and the om-

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¹⁵⁸⁸ Cf. PV, 47 / SV I XIII, 535.
¹⁵⁸⁹ Cf. PV, 132–133 / Pap. X 5 B 107, pp. 291–292.
¹⁵⁹¹ See PV, 133–134 / Pap. X 5 B 107, pp. 292–293.
¹⁵⁹² PV, 50–51 / SV I XIII, 538.
¹⁵⁹³ See PV, 57–70 / SV I XIII, 543–556.
And if he is a genuine “truth-witness,” what Kierkegaard calls “an authentic religious teacher,” he does that with such consistency and authority that his opposition will not go unnoticed. Kierkegaard denies that he has been “a truth-witness in the stricter sense” or the ideal Christian, but he claims that at least to some extent he has also expressed in his action, and in his life, what he has aimed at in his writings. In The Point of View Kierkegaard writes that to be an author ought to be “a work [en Gjerning, an action, a deed, here apparently the same as en Livs-Gjerning, a life-work, a calling] and therefore a personal existing.” The personal existence of the communicator should be in line with his communication. In accordance with this, Kierkegaard claims to have conformed his personal existence to his writing. In the language of The Concept of Irony, he has not rested, satisfied with being a poet, but has at least attempted to live poetically in the given historical actuality. Let us see how.

Kierkegaard writes that in the period of his authorship dominated by “the esthetic writing” (1843–1845) he actually did his best to be regarded by the public as a frivolous aesthete and succeeded in this very well. While apparent frivolity was in harmony with the mood and content of the aesthetic writings, it also served to weaken the admiration that the voluminous and brilliant production would probably have otherwise aroused in his con-

1598 PV, 57 / SVI XIII, 543–544.
1599 Cf. CI, 326 / SVI XIII, 389.
1600 See PV, 61 / SVI XIII, 547–548.
temporaries. Kierkegaard did not want to become a demigod like Goethe or Johan Ludvig Heiberg. He wanted to let “the bewitchery of the esthetic” first come forward in order then to negate and overcome it.  

Hence, to “weaken the impression” of himself and to “deceive [the world] into an understanding of the truth,” he acted in just the opposite way as the one who wishes to win honor and esteem in the world as an ingenious poet.  

He avoided forming cliques and joining “those mutual admiration societies whose members assist each other by word and pen for the sake of the worldly gain.” He did not hide from the human throng, did not veil himself in mystery, in order to produce a lofty and sublime impression of him in the imagination of the public. He did the opposite. He remained in “absolute isolation” without forming alliances with confidants and friends, but at the same time associated equally with everyone alike on the streets of Copenhagen.

While this manner of behaving was an ironic gesture towards striving for worldly power and esteem, for Kierkegaard himself it was at the same time a Christian act of equality and neighbor love. He writes:

\[
\text{It was a purely Christian satisfaction for me to dare to carry out on} \\
\text{Monday a little bit of what on Sunday, when the pastor preaches and} \\
\text{in so doing even sheds tears, one sheds tears over—and on Monday} \\
\text{quite rightly laughs at. It was a purely Christian satisfaction for me} \\
\text{that if ordinarily there was no one else there was definitely one in} \\
\text{Copenhagen with whom any poor person could without ceremony} \\
\text{speak and associate on the street, that if ordinarily there was no one} \\
\text{else, there was one who, no matter in whose company he was on his} \\
\text{walk, did not slink by but acknowledged every maidservant, manservant, and every day laborer he knew in other contexts. It was a purely Christian satisfaction to me that if ordinarily there was no one else}
\]

\[\text{Cf. PV, 46 and 51 / SV1 XIII, 534 and 539.}\]
\[\text{PV, 58 and 60 / SV1 XIII, 545 and 547.}\]
\[\text{PV, 58 / SV1 XIII, 545. See also PV, 71–72 n / SV1 XIII, 556–557 n.}\]
there was one who (several years before existence again assigned the
lesson to the generation [i.e. before 1848]) in action tried a little to
do the doctrine about loving the neighbor... 1604

Thus, beneath the incognito of an aesthete, and ambiguously side
by side with it, there was present at all times the Christian inten-
tion to help an earnest contemporary comprehend. 1605

However, when the transition to the religious writing was
about to take place, Kierkegaard had to alter his personal existence
so that it would conform to the purely religious books. 1606 He ex-
plains that, in order to underscore the ethical-religious category of
“the single individual” in its contrast to the world, he openly chal-
lenged the satirical magazine Corsaren. 1607 Kierkegaard describes in
The Point of View how this magazine dominated the public and
demoralized the population of Copenhagen. He writes that the
hegemony of Corsaren had as its effect “a demoralization that in
relation to the proportions of the little country actually threat-
ened a complete moral disintegration (Opløsning).” 1608 Therefore,
he thought it was time for someone to defy the magazine
openly. 1609 Consequently, in December 1845, he struck his blow
against Corsaren in the newspaper Fædrelandet (Fatherland). 1610

Kierkegaard apparently considered this attack, first of all, as his
ethical duty as a citizen of Denmark in the given historical situ-
ation. But, at the same time, he saw the situation as an opportunity
given by Governance for him to create an appropriate context for

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1604 PV, 60 / SV I XIII, 546. (Translation slightly altered.)
1605 Cf. PV, 34 / SV I XIII, 525.
1606 PV, 63 / SV I XIII, 549.
1608 PV, 65 / SV I XIII, 551.
his religious writings, namely, persecution.\footnote{1611} And it worked. Kierkegaard describes:

Although I was devoting myself exclusively to religious writing, I dared to count on these daily drenchings of rabble-barbarism as negatively supporting, on their having an adequate cooling effect so that the religious communication would not become much too direct or would not much too directly gain adherents for me. The reader could not directly relate himself to me, because I now had in place, instead of the incognito of the esthetic, the danger of laughter and grins, which scare away most people. Even those whom it would not scare away would be disturbed by the next, the thought that I myself had voluntarily exposed myself to all this, had plunged myself into this, a kind of insanity.\footnote{1612}

If the maneuver had been only a literary trick, a poetical move to create the right mood for his texts, it would have indeed been insane and frivolous of Kierkegaard to perform it. But, as noted above, there was also an ethical reason to attack. Moreover, side by side with that, there was a religious reason. In Kierkegaard’s view, the public and the crowd had become the dominating form of evil in the society of his time. Therefore, defying them, and suffering because of it, was the lot of the person whose calling was to clarify the religious truth in this world. He explains:

The essentially religious author is always polemical and in addition suffers under the opposition or endures the opposition that corresponds to what in his time must be regarded as the specific evil. If it is kings and emperors, popes and bishops, and power that are the evil, then he must be recognizable by his being the object of their attacks. If it is the crowd—and blather, the public—and the brutish grinning

\footnote{1611}{See \textit{PV}, 63 and 66 / \textit{SV1} XIII, 549 and 552.}
\footnote{1612}{\textit{PV}, 66–67 / \textit{SV1} XIII, 553.}
that are the evil, then he must also be recognizable by his being the
object of that kind of attack and persecution.1613

In other words, by acting ethically in a self-sacrificing way Kierke-
gaard was at the same time making room for and communicating
the religious truth in this world.

Lastly, the action had also a constructive, a kind of “political”
purpose. Kierkegaard explains that by fighting against the rule of
the press and public, by stepping as a single individual against the
crowd and by exposing himself to its persecution, he was concur-
rently working for something positive: he was aiming at a Socratic
reformation of Christendom. The suffering action was the way to
introduce in practice the category that the time needed, the ethi-
cal-religious category of “the single individual” (den Enkelte) and
after the democratic upheavals of 1848 Kierkegaard was able to
write: “I would not trade having brought it forth decisively at the
time, I would not trade it for a kingdom. If the crowd is the evil, if
it is chaos that threatens, there is rescue in one thing only, in be-
coming the single individual, in the rescuing thought: that single
individual.”1614

We shall investigate in subdivision 8.2 how the category of “the
single individual” was the adequate response to the “overwhelming
world-historical events” of his time and the category that pointed
towards “the future of history,” as Kierkegaard maintains.1615 But
first we shall investigate how, according to Kierkegaard himself, he
was being brought up while fulfilling his calling as a religious au-
thor.

1613 PV, 67 / SV I XIII, 553.
1614 PV, 69 / SV I XIII, 555.
1615 Cf. PV, 69 and 121 / SV I XIII, 555 and 607.
8.1.2 Becoming Brought up

As noted above, at the end of On My Work as an Author Kierkegaard states that “before God” he calls his whole work as an author his own “upbringing and development.” In The Point of View he repeats this statement and explains it further: “If I were now to state as categorically definitely as possible Governance’s part in the whole work as an author, I know of no expression more descriptive or more decisive than this: It is Governance that has brought me up, and the upbringing is reflected in the writing process.”\(^{1616}\)

In other words, writing the works that describe the movement from the poet and from the philosopher to the Christian actually reflects the process in which Kierkegaard’s own poetic and philosophic nature was set aside. The aesthetic and philosophic production was an “emptying” that Kierkegaard needed in order to become developed religiously.\(^{1617}\) But as the religious upbringing put pressure on him, Kierkegaard “put pressure on his age.” Hence, Kierkegaard writes, in relation to his age he has not been a teacher but just a fellow-pupil.\(^{1618}\)

Kierkegaard’s religious upbringing had, of course, begun way before the authorship itself. He explains: “As a child, I was rigorously and earnestly brought up in Christianity, insanely brought up, humanly speaking...No wonder, then, that there were times when Christianity seemed to me the most inhuman cruelty, although I never, even when I was furthest away from it, gave up my veneration for it...”\(^{1619}\) He writes that, as a result of his religious upbringing at home and the observations of the world he made as a young man, in his twenty-fifth year he had already come to un-

\(^{1616}\) PV, 77 / SVI XIII, 562.

\(^{1617}\) PV, 5–6 together with 77 / SVI XIII, 494 together with 562.

\(^{1618}\) PV, 78–79 / SVI XIII, 563–564.

\(^{1619}\) PV, 79 / SVI XIII, 564.
derstand that his life should be used in doing penance. Then followed the falling into love with Regine Olsen, which awoke sensuousness in him and made him into a poet, but also meant a religious awakening for him. The combination of falling in love and religious awakening are familiar to us from the first letter of Judge William. But in Kierkegaard’s case the double event did not lead to a happy marital life. Apparently, its effects were more like those described in *Repetition*, in the third part of *Stages on Life’s Way*, and in the analysis of Religiousness *A* in *Postscript*: the event had such religious effects that did not mesh with the equilibrium between the aesthetic and the ethical. Kierkegaard writes that now he came to understand himself “in the most decisive sense” in the religiousness, to which he had also related himself before, but more as to a possibility. Describing this period of his life, he writes: “I was so profoundly shaken that I basically understood that I could not possibly succeed in finding the calm, secure middle course in which most people have their lives—I either had to plunge into despair and sensuality or absolutely choose the religious as the one and only—either the world on a scale that would be dreadful or the monastery.” Kierkegaard claims that he chose the latter. He writes that when he started to write *Either/Or*, personally he was already “in the monastery.” In other words, neither the “either” of the young aesthete A, nor the “or” of the ethical judge were any longer actual options for Kierkegaard himself.

But, apparently, they were still possibilities that he had to reflect on, both for the sake of his own integrity and because they

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1620 *PV*, 82 / *SV* XIII, 567.
1621 *PV*, 84–85 / *SV* XIII, 568–569.
1622 See subdivision 3.1.1 above.
1623 *PV*, 84 / *SV* XIII, 569.
1624 *PV*, 35 / *SV* XIII, 526.
were considered among the live “Christian” options in the “Christian” culture, in which he lived. The intensity with which he gave himself to writing books expressed the intensity with which he as a penitent came to reflect and wanted to share with others the truth about the different possibilities of existence. Kierkegaard writes that his work as an author was “an attempt by one deeply humbled, a penitent, to make up, if possible, for something by means of every sacrifice and effort in the service of truth.”

According to Kierkegaard’s own testimony, the truth that he wanted to serve was, already at the beginning of his authorship, the Christian truth. This truth he had learnt to venerate as a child, and he thought that by clarifying it to everyone he would benefit humanity. But to attain and bring forth this truth as a live option, he had to reflect and present side by side with it various possible untruths, i.e. the various possibilities of illusory existence, through which the dialectical movement into Christian existence must pass in modern, reflective Christendom. For this task his talent and bent for imaginative observation of people were just what was needed. Kierkegaard explains how before his authorship he was already versed in reflecting and making observations not only on his own life, but also on the lives of the others. He made observations close at hand on “desires, passions, moods, feelings, etc.”; he gained experience in “entering into and coming out of a person and also in imitating him”; and he practiced “dialectical exercises with an admixture of imagination.” As a religious author, then,

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1626 PV, 24 / SV1 XIII, 519.
1627 Kierkegaard was planning “to empty [himself] of the poetic as quickly as possible” and then take to the country as a rural pastor (PV, 86 / SV1 XIII, 570).
1628 See PV, 79–81 / SV1 XIII, 564–566.
1630 PV, 82 / SV1 XIII, 566–567.
he made use of his experience as an observer in measuring the distance and in mapping the path from actual human existence to the ideal Christian existence.

Kierkegaard characterizes his assignment as being “a spy in a higher service.”\textsuperscript{1631} He refers to spies used by police to find out what is happening among criminals. Such spies have been, and perhaps still are, criminals themselves. Thus, they are far from being saints and, while spying, they are themselves “under the strictest surveillance.” But they are useful just because they are what they are, “experienced, sly, scheming, sagacious persons who can sniff out everything, above all pick up the trail and expose.”\textsuperscript{1632} Kierkegaard explains that such spies Governance uses in Christendom, which “has gone astray in reflection and sagacity,” to expose the treasons of humanity against the majesty of God.\textsuperscript{1633}

However, writes Kierkegaard, “there is this infinite difference between Governance and the municipal police—that Governance, who is compassionate love, precisely out of love uses such a person, rescues and brings him up, while he uses all his sagacity, which in this way is sanctified and consecrated.”\textsuperscript{1634}

In this way, then, Kierkegaard existed among his contemporaries: As a penitent religious author, who wanted to clarify and purify the Christian ideal, but also to understand it in a more inward way himself. As a maieutician, who was being brought up himself while providing an occasion for others to learn. As a spy under the strictest surveillance of Governance, who also served his fellow beings inasmuch as they wanted to attain true self-consciousness.

By “his upbringing” Kierkegaard seems to refer first of all to the upbringing in inwardness that pertained to this existence as a penitent religious author. First, he did not write “upbuilding”\textsuperscript{1635}

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\textsuperscript{1631} PV, 87 / SV1 XIII, 571.
\textsuperscript{1632} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1633} Cf. PV, 88 and 87–89 n / SV1 XIII, 572 and 572–573 n.
\textsuperscript{1634} PV, 87 / SV1 XIII, 571.
ethical-religious texts just for the others, but for his own upbuilding. In fact, the texts were just an expression of the ethical-religious striving that he felt the Christian truth demanded from him. Second, as a spy and maieutician he had to constrain and Christianly deny himself in order to be truly helpful to others. He could not share his fundamental thoughts with others in an immediate and natural way. He writes that his life as a penitent religious author was a life of self-denial understandable only for those who can understand what true self-denial is. He tells us that he resigned voluntarily the esteem, love, admiration, and friendship that he would have received, had he been willing to form cliques and join “mutual admiration societies.” Instead of securing for himself confidants and friends that would have made his life easier, he wanted to do his utmost to clarify and express the truth: that there is God, to whom each of us is related as a single individual. Giving up the natural human ways of life, giving up the tempting esthetic and esthetic-ethical possibilities open for everyone in Christendom in order to truly serve God, involved human suffering. At the same time striving to serve God the way Kierkegaard did, as a single individual, was altogether incomprehensible for most of his contemporaries and meant in their eyes “a kind of misanthropic treason.” Kierkegaard writes that, according to the Goethean and Hegelian pantheistic view dominating the age, each human individual should serve the human race as the highest and satisfy the demands of the times. In opposition to this view, he had committed himself to the view that God is “the middle term,” through which each human individual should relate whether he relates to himself, to other human beings, or to the world. Instead of respecting “what the times demand,” he

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1636 PV, 58, 71–72 n, and 88 n / SV/I XIII, 545, 556–557 n, and 572 n.
1637 PV, 43 and 83 / SV/I XIII, 531 and 567–568.
1638 PV, 87–89 n, and 122 / SV/I XIII, 572–573 n, and 608.
wanted to make room for "what the times in the deepest sense need," and this was "eternity," about which the age that was fully immersed in temporality did not want to hear anything.\(^{1639}\)

Hence, prior to the affair with Corsaren and the persecution that followed it, Kierkegaard had already become familiar with suffering involved in truly becoming a Christian. But, he writes, he had come to know only the “inner suffering,” and so far he had missed the other suffering that pertains to becoming a Christian. Here, claims Kierkegaard, Governance came to assist him so that he “became brought up more fully in what it is to be a Christian.” The affair with Corsaren gave him “the opportunity to experience what one can never really believe without having experienced it, this Christian scale [dette Christelige]: that love is hated.”\(^{1640}\)

Kierkegaard writes that during the period of the aesthetic writing he had found Christian satisfaction in making no difference between human beings: in striving to realize at least a little of the doctrine of neighborly love in action. Precisely by this act, Kierkegaard writes, he came to learn how the common people let themselves be seduced by wretched journalists that claim to strive for equality.\(^{1641}\) Kierkegaard is referring to his affair with Corsaren. As a reaction to his attack at it, Corsaren started to make fun of Kierkegaard and portray him as a haughty but ridiculous eccentric. The given opportunity was taken up with gratitude by the common people of Copenhagen, who now had a well-known character personalizing the pride and exclusiveness of the cultural elite to attack. Kierkegaard explains:

\[\text{[M]yself of humble descent, I have loved the common man or what is called the simple class—this I know I have done. I sadly found my joy in that—and yet they are the very ones who were incited to attack}\]

\(^{1639}\) PV, 104 / SV1 XIII, 590.

\(^{1640}\) PV, 89–90 / SV1 XIII, 574.

\(^{1641}\) PV, 60 / SV1 XIII, 547.
on me and made to think that I was exclusive. If I had actually been exclusive, this never would have happened to me...But that I, because I have lived as I have lived, have been exposed to the common man’s hatred because I have not been exclusive enough...this is lunacy—and the Christian scale.  

That he had no protection or support from the powerful and estimable was quite understandable, since he did not participate in their elitism but through his action weakened their worldly power and esteem. But it was ludicrous that just because of this he was then attacked by the common man. 

From the Christian point of view, however, it was quite natural. Because Kierkegaard had acted as a Christian individual and associated equally with everyone, he had become a kind of eccentric in the world of cliques, connections, parties, and classes. In Christendom his abnormal, “unnatural” behavior was interpreted not as an expression of Christian equality and neighbor love, but as an expression of tremendous pride. In consequence, every mistreatment of him was considered as a duty to God. That may sound strange, but in the light of Christianity there is nothing strange in it: the fate of Christ shows that this is how the crowd and the elite together betray the ones who as single individuals put into practice the ideal of human equality. What Kierkegaard came to experience was only the concrete persecution that the self-sacrificing Christian love always encounters in the world, and without this experience something essential would have been lacking in his Christian upbringing.

In this way Kierkegaard was brought up by Governance, while following his calling in the historical and social world. Even if he perhaps achieved nothing in this world, he maintains that he had

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1642 PV, 90 / SVI XIII, 574.
not lived in vain inasmuch as he had practiced Christian self-denial.\footnote{PV, 44 / SV1 XIII, 532–533.} He writes that Christianly, in his inwardness, he understood that for him the meaning of the whole undertaking was that he was brought up in Christianity. Hence, he claims, “also here in the world he found what he sought: ‘that single individual’; if no one else was that, he himself was and became that more and more.”\footnote{PV, 97 / SV1 XIII, 582.}

Here we encounter once again “that single individual,” so let us have a closer look at him.

### 8.2 The Category through Which the Age Must Go

Both in studying the pseudonymous texts and in studying Kierkegaard’s accounts of his authorship, we have repeatedly come across the category of “the single individual” (den Enkelte). In investigating *The Concept of Anxiety*, I argued against the interpretation by Gregor Malantschuk that to be “the single individual” also meant for Kierkegaard to be “individuum,” i.e. to be simultaneously “both oneself and the race.”\footnote{See subdivision 5.1.1.} The view that to be the single individual also involves fulfilling one’s obligation as a member of human race also finds support in Kierkegaard’s texts on his authorship. Above we have seen that for Kierkegaard to become the single individual at the same time means to be brought up religiously\footnote{See PV, 10–11 and 97 / SV1 XIII, 497–499 and 582 that have been referred to above.} and to fulfill one’s personal calling in the given historical actuality.\footnote{See PV, 68–69 / SV1 XIII, 554–555 and PV, 133–134 / Pap. X 5 B 107, pp. 292–293 that have been referred to above.} This double function of “the single individual” be-

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\footnote{PV, 44 / SV1 XIII, 532–533.} \footnote{PV, 97 / SV1 XIII, 582.} \footnote{See subdivision 5.1.1.} \footnote{See PV, 10–11 and 97 / SV1 XIII, 497–499 and 582 that have been referred to above.} \footnote{See PV, 68–69 / SV1 XIII, 554–555 and PV, 133–134 / Pap. X 5 B 107, pp. 292–293 that have been referred to above.}
comes even clearer in the text “The Single Individual” that was published as an appendix to The Point of View.

In “The Single Individual” Kierkegaard notes that whereas among his contemporaries the matter of the single individual is generally regarded as a triviality, for him it is “the most decisive.”\textsuperscript{1651} He explains why he considers it is so. First of all, it is important “to oppose boldly an immoral confusion that philosophically and socially wants to demoralize the single individuals by means of humanity or fantastic social categories.”\textsuperscript{1652} The reason is, thus, an ethical one: there is an “immoral” confusion in the way the individual is subdued under social categories. But there is also a religious reason to oppose the confusion, since the confusion is not only immoral, but also “ungodly.” According to Kierkegaard, to be an individual human being is “the first condition of all religiousness.”\textsuperscript{1653} While every human being is in the possession of this condition (\textit{Betingelse}), since every human being is indeed an individual human being, the point is to grant the proper value for it, that is, for being an individual. Kierkegaard writes: “The single individual...in the sense in which every human being...can be and should be an individual, should place his honor—but will also truly find his salvation—in being an individual.”\textsuperscript{1654}

With the immoral and ungodly confusion of his age Kierkegaard apparently refers, at least, to the Goethean and Hegelian misunderstanding, on which he writes in \textit{The Point of View}. As was noticed above, this misunderstanding consisted in applying the category of “human race” directly to what it means to be a human being, without God being “the middle term.”\textsuperscript{1655} Similarly, in “The Single Individual” Kierkegaard writes about “the modern

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1651] PV, 113–114 / SV I XIII, 599–600.
\item[1653] PV, 117 / SV I XIII, 603.
\item[1654] Ibid.
\item[1655] PV, 88 n / SV I XIII, 572 n.
\end{footnotes}
view (incidentally the old paganism)—namely, that to be a human being is to belong as a specimen to a race endowed with understanding.” If this view is the correct one, “then the race, the species, is higher than the individual or then there are only specimens, not individuals.” According to The Point of View, that is not the case. Instead, everyone is related to God as the single individual and, thereby, he is raised above the human race. Kierkegaard writes:

I have tried to express that to apply the category "human race" to what it means to be a human being, especially as a term for the highest, is a misunderstanding and paganism, because the human race, humankind, is different from an "animalkind" not only by the advantages of race but by this humanness, that every individual in the human race (not just an outstanding individual, but every individual) is more than the race. This has its basis in the God-relationship (and this is Christianity, whose category the single individual is so strangely laughed to scorn by our esteemed Christian age), because to relate oneself to God is far superior to relating oneself to the race or through the race to God.

The quotation above might suggest that there is no reconciliation whatsoever between being a member of the human race and being the single individual, but only a straightforward choice: either to be loyal to humanity or to be loyal to God and become the single individual. If that were the case Malantschuk’s interpretation of the movement in Kierkegaard’s thought would be correct: the movement would be from the individual (Individ) that “stands in a relationship of thoroughgoing dependence upon the race and environment” to the single individual (den Enkelte) that stands in an "existential God-relationship." Hence, at the end of the de-

1656 PV, 107 / SV I XIII, 593.
1657 PV, 88 n / SV I XIII, 572 n. (Translation slightly altered.)
velopment we could forget the situational aspects of human existence.

However, Kierkegaard himself nowhere states that we may forget our thoroughgoing dependence on the age, history, and the human race. Instead he writes: “The single individual is the category through which, in a religious sense, the age, history, the human race must go.”\footnote{PV, 118 / SV1 XIII, 604.} This statement is interesting, for it suggests the thought that one fulfills the task of the race and the age precisely in that one becomes the single individual. The thought receives confirmation in the continuation of the text. On the following page Kierkegaard claims that the fact that he has used this category decisively and personally, and also in action, shows that “he had understood his age and was himself aware: that it was an age of disintegration [Opløsning, dissolution].”\footnote{PV, 119 / SV1 XIII, 605.} In other words, it is appropriate to emphasize the category of the single individual just because the present age is an age of disintegration. In a footnote annexed to this statement Kierkegaard suggests that, in order to understand his view on the age, the reader should consult the last section of his review on Two Ages.\footnote{PV, 119 n.2 / SV1 XIII, 605.} So let us do that.\footnote{The following synopsis of the main ideas of Two Ages is based on an article of mine published in the journal Tiede & edistys (see Kylliäinen 2005).}

In the last section of the work known in English with the title Two Ages (En litterær Anmeldelse, 1846), Kierkegaard analyzes his own age, “the present age.” On the background of the analysis, there is a general view about the historical development of forms of society, a historical classification of social formations. Kierkegaard writes:

The dialectic of antiquity was oriented to the eminent (the great individual—and then the crowd; one free man, and then the slaves); at present the dialectic of Christianity is oriented to representation (the
majority perceive themselves in the representative and are liberated by the awareness that he is representing them in a kind of self-consciousness). The dialectic of the present age is oriented to equality and the most consistent erroneous implementation of equality is leveling as the negative unity of the negative mutuality of the individuals.1663

To interpret: Different ages are oriented to certain ideas of social organization. While exceptions and tensions may occur, a certain form of organization reigns in each age. In antiquity only the few eminent ones, the men of excellence such as Achilles, Hippocrates, Plato, and Caesar, were worth taking into consideration. Kierkegaard writes: “In antiquity the individual in the crowd had no significance whatsoever; the man of excellence stood for them all...The eminent personage dared to consider everything permissible, the individuals in the crowd nothing at all.”1664 In the Christian period this idea of social organization was displaced by the “idea of representation.”1665 Within this formation the members of the community considered priests and bishops, knights and kings as their representatives. In this way the majority was liberated through its heroes and representatives, and it maintained its freedom in its free subordination under them.1666

Typical to these older formations was an open and recognized hierarchy. Kierkegaard writes:

1663 TA, 84 / SVI VIII, 79. (Translation slightly altered.)
1666 The principle of organization is familiar to us from Practice in Christianity. As we noted in subdivision 7.2.2, Anti-Climacus wrote that in “the Church triumphant” those of a particular order, the members of the clergy, were appointed the task of expressing what it means to be a Christian. The majority of Christians were “content with perceiving themselves in the order that represented them.” (PC, 214 / SVI XII, 197.) Similarly, in medieval European culture the nobility represented and fought for their people that were liberated through the virtuousness of their champions.
[I]n older formations (of relations between generation and individual) the non-commissioned officers, officers, company commanders, generals, the hero (that is, the men of excellence, the men of rank within their various hierarchies, the leaders), were recognizable, and each (according to his authority) along with his little detachment was picturesquely and organically ordered within the whole, each supported by and supporting the whole...

In Europe this organic hierarchy (or what was left of it, its outer shell) was dethroned by the French revolution in the name of freedom and equality. According to Kierkegaard, this passionate revolt aimed at the “restoring of natural conditions, as opposed to a fossilized formalism which, by having lost the originality of the ethical, had become a desiccated ruin, a petty-minded custom and practice.”

His own age, “the present age,” Kierkegaard sees as a sequel to the age of revolution. The organizing idea that looms in secret and regulates the human relationships is the one that in the age of revolution generated an impassioned and violent revolt: also the present age “is oriented to equality.”

The last chapter, chapter III of Kierkegaard’s literary review consists of a comparison between the two ages oriented towards equality: the age of revolution and the present age. The occasion for the comparison is the novel Two Ages (To Tidsaldre, 1845), in which the author Mrs. Gyllembourg depicts side by side the enthusiastic 1790s and the prosaic and reflecting 1840s. The crite-

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1668 *TA*, 84 / *SV1* VIII, 62. (Translation slightly altered.) We may notice that Kierkegaard protested against the same “fossilized formalism” in *The Concept of Irony* (see *CI*, 303–304 / *SV1* XIII, 371–372). It was this petty-minded rule of custom and practice that in his view gave relative justification even for the “Romantic” and full justification for the “mastered” irony.
rion for Kierkegaard’s comparison is how the members of the community relate to their ideals and to each other. With an eye on this Kierkegaard presents an *abistorical classification of social formations*. He writes:

If the essential passion, the one purpose, is removed, then everything becomes meaningless externality, devoid of character; the spring of ideality stops flowing and the shared life becomes stagnant water—

and that is crudeness. Purely dialectically...the relations are as follows. When the individuals (each one individually) relate essentially and passionately to an idea and, on top of that, in union essentially relate to the same idea, the relation is optimal and in accordance with the norm. The relation singles out individually (each has himself for himself) and unites ideally...Thus individuals never come too close to each other in the herd sense, just because they are united at an ideal distance. The unanimity of separation is indeed fully orchestrated music. If, on the other hand, individuals relate to an idea merely *en masse* (that is, without the individual, inward-directed singling out) we get violence, anarchy, unbridledness; but if there is no idea for the individuals *en masse* and no individually separating essential inwardness, either, then we have crudeness.  

While the age of revolution was violent and immoderate, it was still *essentially passionate*. On the other hand, the present age is “essentially a sensible, reflecting age, devoid of passion.”  

Whereas the age of revolution was characterized by a passionate belief in ideas and by enthusiastic action that changed reality, the present age, the 1840s, is characterized by skeptical reflection that drains the blood out of reality. Kierkegaard writes:

A passionate, tumultuous age wants to *overthrow everything, subvert everything*. An age that is revolutionary but also reflecting and devoid

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1669 *TA*, 62–63 / *SV* VIII, 59. (Translation slightly altered.)
1671 *TA*, 68 / *SV* VIII, 64.
of passion changes the manifestation of power into a dialectical sleight-of-hand: it lets everything remain but subtly drains the meaning out of it; rather than culminating in an uprising, it exhausts the inner actuality of relations in a tension of reflection that lets everything remain and yet has transformed the whole of existence into an equivocation which, in its facticity, is—while privately a dialectical fraud interpolates a secret way of reading—that it is not. \(^{1672}\)

Such nihilism generates “crudeness” (Raahed, rawness). Kierkegaard writes: “Individuals do not in inwardness turn away from each other, nor do they turn outwards in unanimity over an idea, but towards each other in checking and suspicious, tactless, leveling reciprocity.” \(^{1673}\)

Criticism and skepticism connect the members of a reflecting, passionless community only in a negative way: in reciprocal checking. While in a passionate age enthusiasm was the unifying principle, in a reflecting age envy becomes the negatively unifying principle. According to Kierkegaard, envy (Misuundelse, here, it seems, that one does not grant [unde] anyone any worth) is integral to passionless and checking reflection itself. Kierkegaard writes that reflection’s envy “holds the will and energy in a kind of captivity.” Already in the individual himself it curbs all impassioned action, and if the individual is able to overcome its opposition in himself so that he is ready to act, then “the reflective opposition of his associates” will stop him. \(^{1674}\) Eventually, the confining activity integral to reflection itself also generates ethical envy. Kierkegaard describes: “While on the tension of reflection the better energies keep each other in check, baseness rises to the surface, its impudence impressing like a kind of force and its contemptuousness becoming its protecting privilege, because it allows it to escape

\(^{1672}\) TA, 77 / SVI VIII, 73. (Translation slightly altered.)

\(^{1673}\) TA, 63 / SVI VIII, 60. (Translation slightly altered.)

\(^{1674}\) TA, 81 / SVI VIII, 76.
envy’s attention.”

Through such dialectic, nasty, impudent envy becomes little by little the dominating force in the society.

In modern society envy establishes itself in leveling (Nivelling). While in antiquity it was fate that brought down the prominent men, in modern times leveling does the same. Leveling brings everyone to the same plane. It stifles and impedes, like an engineer it levels all that disturbs through exceptionality, so that everything fits smoothly to the totality of the generation. In the name of the infinite abstraction, pure humanity, it implements equality.

Leveling is effective in modern societies, because there has come into being in them “the spirit of leveling,” the public (Publikum). The public is a kind of phantom, “a monstrous abstraction, an all-encompassing something that is nothing.” Such a phantom comes into being in a passionless but reflecting age with the help of the press. It is composed of unsubstantial individuals that are never united in the contemporaneity (Samtidighed) of a situation or organization, and yet are claimed to form a whole. It is composed of individuals as they are in the moment when they are nobodies, when they are not engaged in any way. Talk about the demoralization of absolute monarchy or the decadence of revolutionary periods, the passionless reflecting age is just as corrupt, claims Kierkegaard. He compares the sluggish “gallery-public” to a well-fed Roman emperor suffering from boredom and looking for any kind of amusement. For this purpose the emperor has a dog, the contemptible part of the literary world, i.e. magazines and journals like Corsaren. If someone superior appears, perhaps even a man of distinction, the dog is goaded to attack him, and then the fun begins. And the public has no reason to repent,

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1675 *TA*, 82 / *SV* VIII, 77. (Translation slightly altered.)
1676 *TA*, 84–88 / *SV* VIII, 79–82.
1677 *TA*, 90 / *SV* VIII, 84.
1678 *TA*, 91 and 93 / *SV* VIII, 85 and 86–87.
for after all it was not the public, but “the dog,” and after all it was not really slander, it was just “a bit fun.”

This way, then, the ideal of equality is realized in Kierkegaard’s own enlightened age, the age of reflection: through envy and leveling, and with the help of the public, everything that represents or aims at something higher is leveled down. The result of this silent revolution is the tacit dissolution and disintegration of the old Denmark. Although the absolute monarchy and the state church are still formally intact, in effect passionless, skeptical reflection is equalizing the hierarchies. Kierkegaard writes:

The established order continues to stand, but since it is equivocal and ambiguous, passionless reflection is reassured. We do not want to abolish monarchy, by no means, but if little by little we could get it transformed into make-believe, we would gladly shout: “Hurrah for the King!” We do not want to topple eminence, by no means, but if simultaneously we could spread the notion that it is all make-believe, we would approve and admire. In the same way we are willing to keep Christian terminology but privately know that nothing decisive is supposed to be meant by it. And we will not be repentant, for after all we are not demolishing anything. We do not want a powerful king any more than we want a liberator or a religious authority. No, quite harmlessly and inoffensively we allow the established order to go on, but in a reflective knowledge we are more or less aware of its non-existence.

Nihilistic reflection, thus, replaces the ethical-religious passion through which individuals formerly related themselves to the ideals and to each other. This hollows out the basis of the order that characterized the period of representation. In his notebooks Kierkegaard remarks that “in our age each individual is already on his way to become too reflective to be satisfied just with being

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1680 TA, 80–81 / SV1 VIII, 75–76.
Chapter 8: Kierkegaard on His Work and Life

represented.” In other words, there is no return to the hierarchic Christian formation: the period of equality is here for good. The problem is, however, that emancipation through nihilistic reflection does not produce a new healthy society. Kierkegaard notes: “If we say of revolutionary age that it takes a wrong turn [farer vild], then we may say of the present age that it turns out badly [farer ilde]. The individual and the generation are continually contradicting themselves and each other…”

In Kierkegaard’s view, modern society is imbued with negativity and torn inwardly asunder by contradictions. The blame for the disintegration of society is not only laid on magazines like Corsaren, or on liberal newspapers like Kjobenhavnsposten and Fædrelandet that Kierkegaard had attacked in his first published writings in 1835–1836. In Either/Or Kierkegaard had already pointed out that all parties, all coteries and associations, take part in the silent dissolution process just by being parties. In Part I of the work he lets the ironic aesthete speak:

Existence is considerably undermined by doubt of subjects and isolation is constantly gaining the upper hand, the best confirmation of which is to take note of all the various social exertions [sociale Bestræbelser]. By aiming to oppose the tendency of isolation, such exertions serve only to confirm it, as far as they do so by adopting such misguided means. To be isolated is to assert oneself numerically; when you assert yourself as one, that is isolation. I’m sure all friends of association will concur with me in this, even if they are incapable of seeing that just the same isolation obtains when hundreds want to assert themselves as nothing but hundreds...All these associations bear the stamp of contingency and are usually formed for one accidental purpose or other, the lord of which is the association itself. The many associations thus prove the age’s dissolution [Tidens Opløshed], and themselves help to hasten it...When did political

1681 JP 4, 4109 / Pap. VII 1 A 17. (Translation slightly altered.)
1682 TA, 69 / SVI VIII, 65. (Translation slightly altered.)
clubs begin to be general in Greece if not just when the state was on the point of dissolution [var ifærd med at opløse sig]?...Hasn’t that invisible spiritual bond loosened which held state together politically? Isn’t the power of religion, which held fast to the invisible, weakened and destroyed? Haven’t the statesmen and clergy this in common, that like the augurs of old they find it hard to look at one another without smiling?\footnote{EO1, 141–142 / SV1 1, 119. (Translation altered. Alterations follow closely Alastair Hannay’s translation in Søren Kierkegaard: Either/Or, trans. by A. Hannay. London: Penguin Books, 2001, 140–141.)}

The statement by an ironic aesthete might simply be passed over as a statement by an ironic aesthete. But, as was noticed above in subdivision 3.2.2, in Part II of Either/Or the earnest judge confirms the diagnosis of the young aesthete. Judge William writes: “Our age reminds one vividly of the dissolution [Opløsning] of the Greek city-state: everything remains as it is, and yet there is no longer anyone who believes in it. The invisible spiritual bond that gives it validity no longer exists...”\footnote{EO2, 18 / SV1 1, 19. (Translation slightly altered.)}

Thus, Kierkegaard is not criticizing any particular party of his age. He is not only attacking the reformatory liberalist party and defending the conservatives. In his view the Hegelian conservatives also promote the dissolution with their newspapers and elitist coteries, even if unwillingly and unconsciously. And to idolize popular sociality, as the Grundtvigians do, does not heal the society, either. Referring, in my interpretation, both to the Hegelians and to the Grundtvigians, Kierkegaard writes in Two Ages:

> It is very doubtful that the age will be saved by the idea of sociality, of communion [Menigheden, congregation]...The principle of association (which can at best have validity with respect to material interests) is, in our time, not affirmative but negative; it is an evasion, a diversion, an illusion, whose dialectic is this: as this principle strengthens individuals, it also enervates them; through solidarity it...
strengthens numerically, but this from the ethical point of view is also to debilitate.\footnote{TA, 106 / SVI VIII, 99. (Translation slightly altered.)}

But if not the associations, then what could heal and build up the spirit of society anew?

Paradoxically, the cure against disintegration (\textit{Opløsning}) that Kierkegaard suggests in \textit{Two Ages} is just a deeper, ethical-religious implementation of the ideals of Enlightenment (\textit{Oplysning}), that is, of freedom, fraternity, and equality.

In \textit{Two Ages} Kierkegaard suggests that the leveling typical to the modern age is, in fact, part of a religious upbringing of individuals. Leveling raises up, albeit indirectly: by destroying the idols of the external world, it creates a situation where individuals must learn to be satisfied with the essentiality of the religious life in which all men are equal before God.\footnote{TA, 88–89 / SVI VIII, 82–83.} Likewise, the irresponsibility and unreliability of the public may be educative, if in reaction to it the individual learns “to be satisfied in the highest religious sense with himself and his relationship to God.”\footnote{TA, 93 / SVI VIII, 86.}

“Only when the single individual has acquired in himself an ethical stance in face of the whole world can there be any question of genuinely uniting; otherwise it gets to be union of people who separately are weak, a union as unbeautiful and corrupt as child marriages,” claims Kierkegaard in \textit{Two Ages}.\footnote{TA, 106 / SVI VIII, 99. (Translation slightly altered.)} In other words, the modern development, the leveling down of naïve hierarchies and the reflective suspension of traditional human relationships, creates an opportunity for a new ethical-religious community of single individuals. After reflection has suspended the spontaneous, immediate forms of association, new association is possible through ethical and religious passion that refers human existence
back to the absolute. Kierkegaard’s scheme for the ideal development is as follows:

1. the period of immediate, spontaneous inspiration,
2. the period of prudence (*Klogskaben*) and deliberation (*Beregningen*),
3. the period of the highest and most intensive, “infinite enthusiasm.”

The word “infinite” here, presumably, does not only refer to the intensity of enthusiasm, but to the fact that enthusiasm arises as the single individual relates to the infinitude of God, which transcends the finitude as a whole, and thereby gives up all petty-minded prudence. Thus, for example, Socrates was prudent enough but, possessed by an infinite enthusiasm, he disdained acting in accordance with prudence. As we see, for example, in Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates squandered all prudent deliberation in order to reach for something higher.  

However, despite the possibility open to every reflecting person, Kierkegaard doubts that such infinite enthusiasm will ever win great popularity. There will probably always be only few men of excellence that reach it. However, in the period of equality the eminent ones cannot be on the top of a recognized hierarchy anymore as they were in antiquity and in the Christian period that followed it. As the principle of social organization changes, something gets lost: the recognizable men of excellence, the authorities, who represent what is best and to whom the common man could always look for orientation, when things got hazy before his eyes. The men of excellence will now understand the equality of all men before God and will therefore avoid becoming authorities. However, the development is still a step forward, because all the individuals, who are rescued, gain the specific gravity of the religious

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1689 TA, 110–111 / SV1 VIII, 103.
1690 TA, 111 / SV1 VIII, 103–104.
1691 TA, 111 / SV1 VIII, 103.
life first hand from God. The task of the eminent person will no more be to constrain men by dominating them; now he may express his infinite love towards men in constraining himself. His task is not to rule, to guide, to lead, but in suffering to serve.\textsuperscript{1692}

In the text "The Single Individual," Kierkegaard suggests that this ethical-religious category, "the single individual," is the adequate response to "the age of disintegration."\textsuperscript{1693} In the light of Two Ages, it is easier to understand what he means. As stated in Two Ages, the ideal would be that "individuals (each one individually) relate essentially and passionately to an idea and, on top of that, in union essentially relate to the same idea."\textsuperscript{1694} It is quite clear that this is still Kierkegaard’s view in "The Single Individual," where "the single individual" is given the central role in what we have called above as Kierkegaard’s (anti)political policy. With the help of the category of "the single individual" Kierkegaard gives his corrective to modern political development. Fundamentally, Kierkegaard, too, fights for freedom and equality. But he maintains that these ideals can never be attained through politics, i.e. through the pursuit of worldly power. They may be attained only through anti-political means: through the personal ethical-religious practice of single individuals.

Right at the beginning of "The Single Individual," in the preface of the text, Kierkegaard challenges the political reformers of his time. He writes:

An impatient politician who hastily glances at these pages will certainly find only little for his upbuilding—so be it. If, however, he would kindly be a little patient, I am convinced that he, too, will become aware...that the religious is the transfigured rendition of what a

\textsuperscript{1692} TA, 106–109 / SVI VIII, 99–102.
\textsuperscript{1693} PV, 118–119 / SVI XIII, 604–605.
\textsuperscript{1694} TA, 62 / SVI VIII, 59. (Translation slightly altered.)
politician, provided he actually loves being a human being and loves humankind, has thought in his most blissful moment, even if he will find the religious too lofty and too ideal to be practical.\footnote{PV, 103 / SV1 XIII, 589.}

Kierkegaard claims that the ideals of a modern politician are, in truth, religious ideals, although a “practical” politician does not realize it, because for a politician religiousness seems the peak of impracticality.\footnote{Ibid.} Kierkegaard argues, however, that it is not the religious person who is impractical, it is the politician. This is because the politician’s own practice actually contradicts his ideals. For example, a democratic politician speaks eloquently about humanity and human equality, but in practice he acts directly against these very ideals. Kierkegaard writes:

\begin{quote}
[N]o one basically has more contempt for what it is to be a human being than those who make a profession of standing at the head of a crowd. Suppose that someone, a single human being, comes up to such a person; well, what does he care about him? That is much too little; he haughtily sends him away—there must be hundreds at least. If there are thousands, then he bows and scrapes to the crowd—what untruth!\footnote{PV, 108 / SV1 XIII, 594.}
\end{quote}

In other words, a politician who pursues worldly power bows to the most powerful and cannot, therefore, ever attain the ideals of freedom and equality that he champions.

Kierkegaard claims that politics is, on the whole, an inappropriate means of realizing the ideals of “human-likeness” and “human equality” (\textit{Menneske-Lighed}, a pun on \textit{Menneskelighed}, “humanity”). It is inappropriate because it is eternally impossible to realize this ideal in the medium of “world-likeness” or “worldly equality” (\textit{Verds-Lighed}, a pun on \textit{Verdslighed}, worldliness) in a “world-like” way. Kierkegaard points out that one can see this just
by looking at the categories: by acting in terms of the world, by becoming like the world (verds-lig), a human being will never become human, will never become like a human being should be (menneske-lig). In fact, claims Kierkegaard, only the religious can carry out the task of achieving human equality (Menneske-Lighed) and the religious is “the only true humanity” (Menneskelighed), i.e. the fulfillment of humanity.1698

The argument of Kierkegaard against the possibility of realizing human equality in a worldly way is that world is “the medium that by nature is dissimilarity.”1699 In other words, inasmuch as human beings partake in the world they differ from each other by gifts, resources, and power. Hence, it is impossible to attain human equality, if individuals are unable to transcend worldliness. The action of a politician that fights for equality is always self-contradictory: he needs to bow down to power in order to implement freedom and equality. The result is that freedom and equality no longer serve as ideas that actually regulate his own ethical action, but function as ideological projections that justify his quest for power.

But how, then, does religiousness in practice realize the ideals of human-likeness, humanity, and human equality? According to Kierkegaard, by making human beings into free and responsible individuals and by commanding them to love their neighbor as themselves.

Kierkegaard claims that while for a politician the “crowd” (Mængde) comes to represent truth, because it is most powerful, from the point of view of responsible ethical action the crowd is always untruth. In ethical action the crowd signifies untruth, because it weakens the responsibility of the single individual.1700 Kierkegaard explains that the untruth is that “it is ‘the crowd’ that

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1698 PV, 103–104 / SV I XIII, 589–590. (Translation slightly altered.)
1699 PV, 103 / SV I XIII, 589.
does, what either only the single individual in the crowd does, or in any case each individual does. A crowd is an abstraction, which does not have hands; but every individual ordinarily has two hands... Furthermore, a crowd gives the “courage” to do things that, within himself, the single individual would know wrong: “Take the supreme example, think of Christ...—as an individual alone with him in a solitary place, as an individual to go up to him and to spit him—the human being never was born and never will be who would have the courage or brazenness to do it; that is the truth. But then they became a crowd; then they had the courage for it—frightful untruth!” It is important to note that Kierkegaard does not mean that the rulers and citizens should not take into consideration the well-being of the majority. His point is just that when it comes to the ethical and the religious, one should not regard the crowd as the authority on what is right and wrong. Kierkegaard writes: “[W]ith regard to all temporal, earthly, worldly goals, the crowd can have its validity, even its validity as the decisive factor, that is, as the instance. But...I am speaking about the ethical, the ethical-religious, about the truth, and I say that from the ethical-religious point of view the crowd is untruth if it is supposed to be valid as the instance for what truth is.” In other words, although it is important to consider the well-being of all human beings, the ethical-religious truth opens up only for the single individuals and applies to them unconditionally.

As individuals before God human beings are also equal. The command to love one’s neighbor contains a demand to treat every human being equally. Kierkegaard writes in “The Single Individual”:

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1701 PV, 108 / SV1 XIII, 594.
1702 Ibid.
1703 PV, 106 n.1 / SV1 XIII, 592 n.1.
To honor every individual human being, unconditionally every human being, this is the truth and is to fear God and to love the neighbor; but ethically-religiously to recognize “the crowd” as the authority with regard to the truth is to deny God and cannot possibly be loving the neighbor. The neighbor is the absolutely true expression for human equality. If everyone in truth loved the neighbor as himself, then perfect human equality would be achieved unconditionally.\(^{1704}\)

The connection between neighborly love, human equality, and humanity is explicated by Kierkegaard in *Works of Love*. There Kierkegaard writes that in Christian love (*Kjerlighed*) the individual loves his neighbor, i.e. he loves every and any one, the first person he sees. In order to see his neighbor, the individual must look away from all worldly differences and towards equality before God. This equality is the opposite of predilection, for in God there is no predilection and when we love our neighbor, we love the way God loves. Worldly love (*Elskov*) and friendship, on the other hand, are predilection and predilection’s passion. The other is loved because there is something special in him. Thus, the forms of worldly love are ruled by the laws governing predilection. Actually, the forms of worldly love are merely forms of hidden self-love. When God as “the middle term,” as the third party, is excluded, love tends to become mere reciprocity or solidarity in self-love. Individuals, who love each other because they are in one way or another outstanding, tend to form coalitions from which others are excluded.\(^{1705}\) That which the world calls solidarity (*Sammenhold*) is, therefore, seen by Christianity as an extended form of self-love, in which two or more people in mutually loving each other disregard God and the neighbor. Kierkegaard argues that Christianity is actually the true representative of “the universally human”

\(^{1704}\) *PV*, 111 / *SV1* XIII, 597.

\(^{1705}\) *WL*, 44–60 / *SV1* IX, 47–62.
(det Almene-Menneskelige), whereas every merely human group formation represents something less, namely partisan solidarity. So, for example, with every group that claims to fight for humanity, but then identifies humanity either exclusively with the distinguished or exclusively with the lowly.\textsuperscript{1706} If these groups come to represent for their members what is highest, and if kinship with the rest of humankind, “with unconditionally every person,” is denied, then they become both inhuman and unchristian.\textsuperscript{1707}

Now we can see what Kierkegaard means, when he writes that the religious is “the transfigured rendition of what a politician has thought in his most blissful moment.”\textsuperscript{1708} Modern political development actually points to Christianity which would fulfill its ideals, if it were truly practiced. According to Kierkegaard, the political development that aims at freedom and equality is also in the historical perspective a religious development that has taken a wrong turn. This diagnosis of Kierkegaard’s stems from the 1830s. He already associates the modern political movement and its ideals with Protestantism in his \textit{Journals and Papers} from 1835, where he notes that both Protestantism and the modern political thinking have in common the struggle for the sovereignty of the people.\textsuperscript{1709} A couple of years later, in \textit{From the Papers of One Still Living} (1838), he claims that the principle of the present age “is nothing else than the deep and heartfelt principle of Protestantism, but now as zum Gebrauch für Jedermann [for use of everyone] in absurdum reduced life-view.”\textsuperscript{1710} Since the modern development is actually a distorted religious development, Kierkegaard’s remedy is that it must be re-appropriated religiously. As a spectator of the all-European political chaos of 1848, Kierkegaard prophesizes in

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1706} \textit{WL}, 72–73 and 118–121 / \textit{SV} I IX, 73–74 and 115–117.
\textsuperscript{1707} \textit{WL}, 74 / \textit{SV} I IX, 75.
\textsuperscript{1708} See \textit{PV}, 103 / \textit{SV} I XIII, 589.
\textsuperscript{1709} \textit{JP} 4, 4061 / \textit{Pap}. I A 93.
\textsuperscript{1710} \textit{EPW}, 72 / \textit{SV} I XIII, 64. (Translation slightly altered.)
\end{flushright}
his Journals and Papers: “Even now in 1848, up to the present time, it does indeed look as if everything were politics, but it will no doubt appear that the catastrophe corresponds inversely to the Reformation: then everything appeared to be a religious movement and became politics; now everything appears to be politics but will become a religious movement.” Kierkegaard’s idea is that the ideals of freedom and equality must be understood again as Christian ideals, only then will there be any hope for their becoming true. While impossible to realize through worldly means, freedom and equality can be realized through the self-denying and universally loving practice of ethical-religious individuals.

When it comes to advocating freedom and equality, Kierkegaard Christianly outbids all progressive politicians. He wants to make individuals not only externally but internally free, by relating them as single individuals to the unconditional, i.e. to God; then he wants to make them equal with unconditionally everyone, that is, with all their neighbors. But while Kierkegaard’s conception of freedom and equality is radical and unconditional, it is at the same time conservative. With his category of “the single individual,” Kierkegaard tries to turn political revolution and disintegration back into religious reformation. He identifies human freedom and equality with the personal obedience to God that calms all forms of worldly rebellion. The Christian reformation shall take place tacitly, without fanaticism, as the single individuals relate to God and to their common Christian ideals. It shall take place freely and voluntarily, “without general assemblies, synods, balloting—in

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1711 *JP* 6, 6255, p. 59, n.2 / *Pap*. IX B 63:7, p. 363, n.2. The opposite view that all the religious issues turn out to be political ones in the modern age had been presented in Denmark by J. L. Heiberg. See *Om Philosophiens Betydning for den nuværende Tid*, Copenhagen: 1833 (*ASKB* 568); pp. 16–17.


1713 *PV*, 132–133 / *Pap*. X 5 B 107, pp. 291–293
short, without any profanation.” According to Kierkegaard’s view, this is the only way a true reformation can take place. That the single individuals relate themselves to the ideal is the only way to halt “the vortex” in which the ideal gets lost. He explains:

[L]et the generation, let every individual in it try to exist without the unconditional—it is and remains a vortex...[I]f the generation, or a great number of individuals in the generation, has outgrown the childishness that another human being is the one who represents the unconditional for them—well, nevertheless one cannot thereby do without the unconditional; rather, one can all the less do without it. Thus the single individual must personally relate himself to the unconditional. This is what I...have fought for, fighting against every tyranny, also the tyranny of the numerical. This endeavor of mine has incurred opprobrium as enormous pride and arrogance—I believed, and I do believe, that this is Christianity and love for “the neighbor.”

We have now seen how the single individual fills his place in the given historical actuality: how he tries to turn back the process of disintegration that plagues the modern age by carrying out in practice the ideals towards which modern development points. Thus, the category of “the single individual” does not signify a denial of the individual’s dependence on his race and on its history, as Malantschuk’s interpretation would suggest. On the contrary, introducing the category turns out to be a conscious dialectical move within the history of human race, a move that is made with an eye on the history of the human race. Kierkegaard states this himself. In a draft for “The Single Individual” he lists manifestations of disintegration that his age shows: enervating aestheticism, vacuous attempts to order everything under “the System,”

1714 PV, 133–134 / Pap. X 5 B 107, p. 293.
1715 PV, 134 / Pap. X 5 B 107, p. 293.
domination of “the crowd” and “the public” in politics, nationalism as a misguided remedy, and taking recourse to group formations and parties, to finite cleverness, and to the numerical as powerless attempts to work against the disintegration. Kierkegaard explains that, instead of using these misguided means that only serve to accelerate the disintegration, he thought it was time to advance the ethical and the ethical-religious in the personal existence of the single individual. He concludes: “This, all of which is implied in ‘the single individual’ as well as in the use made of this category, places the writing into another sphere, for ‘that single individual’ will become an historical point de vue [point of view].”

However, Malantschuk’s interpretation has also some support in Kierkegaard’s texts. In a certain sense, the movement every human individual is bound to make is, indeed, from “a relationship of thoroughgoing dependence upon the race and environment” to an “existential God-relationship.” Each of us is on the way from here to eternity and, for Kierkegaard, this future, “the future closest at hand and at every moment equally close,” is much more important than “the future of history.” Hence, Malantschuk is right in as much as for Kierkegaard the most fundamental purpose of becoming the single individual is to reach “an eternal happiness,” the goal that one may reach only as a single individual through personal ethical-religious striving and self-denial. It is also true that to become the single individual means for Kierkegaard giving up “world-likeness,” remembering that “to be a human being is to have kinship with the divine,” and stepping to-

\[1718\] Cf. JP 2, pp. 597–598 / Malantschuk 1993, 67.
\[1720\] See PV, 106 / SV1 XIII, 592, where appeal is made to the apostle Paul, to 1 Cor 9:24 or Phil 3:14.
wards the eternal.\footnote{1721} However, in Kierkegaard’s thinking this coincides with an active Christian existence in the historical world. Precisely by renouncing the worldly and by denying one’s sinful human nature, the individual fulfills his place in the world and becomes truly human. The point is that it is not only eternity, “the future closest at,” to which the proper relation goes through the category of “the single individual,” it is also “the future of the history,” the future of the human race.\footnote{1722} Moreover, in Kierkegaard’s view the task of the single individual is to be a witness for the truth in the world. Accordingly, Kierkegaard did not end his career as an otherworldly ascetic in a monastery, but as a scandal journalist in a fiery polemical discourse with established Christendom.

To sum up: The ethical-religious emphasis on the single individual is Kierkegaard’s response to the political development towards freedom and equality. In his view, the category of “the single individual” is essential for the ethical-religious reformation of community that this development presupposes. At the same time, the category is essential for the salvation of each individual. Even if there never emerged a community of single individuals in this world (and given Christian dogmatics, Kierkegaard is pessimistic), the emphasis on the single individual is still appropriate, for if the individual will not be rescued as the single individual, he will not be rescued at all. Hence, there seems to be a double meaning in Kierkegaard’s words when he writes in *The Point of View*: “If the crowd is the evil, if it is chaos that threatens, there is rescue [Frelse, salvation] in one thing only, in becoming the single individual, in the rescuing thought: that single individual.”\footnote{1723} In other words, the ideal of being the single individual would be the rescue for the democratic mass society, but even if the ideal turns out not to rescue the society, to become the single individual is still the only

\footnote{1721}{See *PV*, 103–106 / *SV1* XIII, 589–593.}  
\footnote{1722}{Cf. *PV*, 121 / *SV1* XIII, 607.}  
\footnote{1723}{*PV*, 69 / *SV1* XIII, 555.}
salvation for a person. Thus, the category of “the single individual” has two functions. On the one hand, it refers to the ethical-religious stance through which a human being may fill his place in the given historical actuality. On the other hand, it points towards the transcendent, eternal goal of the religious upbringing that takes place through the historical actuality. While we become ethical individuals and witnesses to the truth in this world, we are being prepared to move from this world to eternity as single individuals.

8.3 Acting under the Direction of Governance

So far it has been shown, convincingly I hope, that in carrying out his life-work Kierkegaard carefully reflected his situation in the historical and social world. We have seen that he considered his work as an author as a calling, through which he filled his place in society, and that he believed he was being brought up through fulfilling this calling. We have also seen that his authorship was a reaction to the specific historical situation of his time: that he emphasized the ethical-religious single individual, because he considered his age to be an age of disintegration. Kierkegaard’s combination of ethical calling and religious upbringing, and his careful consideration of the historical situation described above, harmonize well with the ideal of living poetically. But what about “the poetical”? Does it still play a central role in Kierkegaard’s life and life-view in the late 1840s, so that we could claim that he still adheres to the ideal of living poetically?

There is a famous statement in On My Work as an Author that might seem to imply that in and through his authorship Kierkegaard bids farewell to the ideal of living poetically. Right at the beginning of his account Kierkegaard states that the movement his authorship as a totality describes is: “from ‘the poet,’ from the aesthetic—from ‘the philosopher,’ from the speculative—to the indi-
cation of the most inward qualification of the essentially Christian." This statement, however, does not mean that Kierkegaard now disclaims his early ideal of living poetically, for “living poetically” never equaled for him living like an aesthete or like a speculative daydreamer. According to Kierkegaard’s own explanation, the statement means that his authorship aims at “simplicity” (Eenfoldighed). The assumption behind the authorship is that “most people in Christendom are Christians only in imagination,” while they actually live “in esthetic or, at most, esthetic-ethical categories.” The desired movement from the aesthetic and the speculative towards simplicity is the movement in which the person gives up this duplicity typical to aesthetic and speculating life in order to arrive at the simple, concrete existence of the single individual. The task is to actualize the Christian ideal in the given historical actuality and not just to cherish it in one’s imagination and thought.

Thus, Kierkegaard emphasizes that the movement of his authorship has been from the pseudonymous Either/Or to Discourses at the Communion on Fridays, which he published in his own name in Christian Discourses and of which two discourses were actually delivered in Vor Frue Kirke (The Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen) by Kierkegaard personally. In other words, an anonymous, ironic author stepped down from the clouds of ambivalence, where he had been hovering, and came to speak to his contemporaries face-to-face in a historically and socially de-
terminated, concrete situation. But such a movement does not break against, but follows directly from the ideal of living poetically that Kierkegaard formulated in *The Concept of Irony*.

Hence, Kierkegaard’s description of the movement of his authorship is, principally, in harmony with the ideal of living poetically and, to show that Kierkegaard still adheres to the ideal, we just need to show that the poetical still informs his life and life-view. With “the poetical” we have referred above

- to the art through which the individual strives to make room for the eternal and infinite in his temporal and finite existence,
- to the central role of imagination and passion in practicing this art,
- to the tendency to understand life in terms of drama,
- to the willingness to take risks and bear uncertainty in order to reach the eternal and infinite in one’s individual life, and
- to the imprudence that defies finite calculations and renounces worldly sagacity for the sake of the eternal and infinite.\(^{1730}\)

I will now seek these Romantic poetical traits in Kierkegaard’s texts on his work as an author.

In Kierkegaard’s thought the eternal and infinite correspond eventually with God. The art is to relate to the eternal and infinite God while existing in temporality and finitude. In “The Single Individual” Kierkegaard writes that what he has been trying to communicate to his contemporaries is “the single individual,” i.e. that as the single individual each of us is alone in the world, alone “face-to-face before God” (*ligeoverfor Gud*). However, Kierkegaard states, no one can teach directly to another person this being face-to-face before God in the middle of the temporal world, since it is not a doctrine, or some other objective content, but “a being able,

\(^{1730}\) See the characterization in the end of the Introduction above.
an art [Kunst], an ethical task and art,” the practice of which takes place in the particular historical circumstances of each individual. The idea is the same as in Postscript, where Climacus noticed that to exist is an art and the passionately existing subjective thinker is an artist.

In Postscript Climacus also noticed that “indirect communication makes communicating into an art.” On My Work as an Author and The Point of View give ample support for this thesis in that they describe the artistry with which Kierkegaard arranged not only his texts, but also his life to communicate his ethical-religious message to his contemporaries. The authorship that Kierkegaard describes to us—the architecture of the works themselves, the maieutic movement that leads the reader from the aesthetic to the religious, the movement of the authorship as a whole that imitates the ideal movement of reflection: from a public sensation with Either/Or towards the privacy of the single individual—this complex whole in which words and acts fit together is, indeed, a miraculous work of a super artist. The deliberate duplexity, the methodical simultaneity of the aesthetic and the religious in the authorship, would already be enough to arouse wonder. But, in addition to this, the ingenious author has also supported his texts with his way of living. With his actions he has created appropriate contexts for his texts. The life of the author here becomes a kind of text in which his acts function as meaningful sentences. Moreover, this text and these sentences are arranged with an eye on the total drama of life so that, within it, they com-

1731 See PV, 123 / SVI XIII, 609. (Italics have been added.)
1733 CUP, 277 / SVI VII, 236; see also CUP, 79 / SVI VII, 60.
1734 PV, 5–7 / SVI XIII, 494–495.
1735 PV, 7–8 / SVI XIII, 495–497.
1737 See PV, 29–70 / SVI XIII, 521–556.
municate a message to other individuals, who are (spell)bound to take part in it.

What has motivated Kierkegaard to carry out this total work of art is, according to his testimony, *passion*: his love for God and for his neighbors. Kierkegaard tells us that his God-relationship has been the happy love of his unhappy and troubled life.\footnote{PV, 67 / SVI XIII, 553.} God he has obeyed, but God he has also relied on, and God has been his only confidant while carrying out his single-handed work.\footnote{PV, 72–75 / SVI XIII, 557–560.} Furthermore, he tells us that he has been motivated by his love for humankind: he has done his best to clarify Christianity, because he has wanted to be helpful to people and to find comfort for them.\footnote{PV, 81 / SVI XIII, 566.} It seems obvious that *imagination* has also played a part in motivating Kierkegaard in his life-work. Kierkegaard states that he has not had an immediate relation to God, but “a relationship of reflection” only.\footnote{PV, 74 / SVI XIII, 559. Note that in *Sickness unto Death* Anti-Climacus states that “the imagination is the possibility of any and all reflection (SUD, 31 / SVI XI, 144.).”} In other words, he has not heard God’s voice, but only imagined how God admonishes him to do his work.\footnote{Cf. PV, 73 / SVI XIII, 558.} On the other hand, he cannot actually know if his work has benefited any other person except for himself—in fact, by all appearances, it has not.\footnote{See PV, 95–97 / SVI XIII, 580–582.} Still, the possibility that his writings could be of help has been his inspiration.\footnote{See PV, 73 / SVI XIII, 558.} Apparently, in cherishing this possibility Kierkegaard relies on his imagination. Furthermore, he also relies on his imagination when he holds to the thought that he is on his way to eternity, where what he knows to be true will become obvious for everyone.\footnote{See PV, 25 and 94–95 / SVI XIII, 519 and 579–580.} Although suffering...
“in the finite sense,” he gains strength as he imagines that through the suffering he will be victorious “in the infinite sense.”

Imagination is also bound to be involved in understanding life as a drama. Kierkegaard’s sense for drama is already obvious in the way he takes into consideration the situation of Christendom as if it were a dramatic situation that demands certain acts and statements from him. Assuming the role of the spy in a higher service exemplifies this and manifests a strong dramatic imagination. Kierkegaard imagines that he is a criminal among criminals, who has a secret assignment from God. In order to carry it out, he has to act as an actor who does not reveal his true character before the drama is over. Kierkegaard’s imaginativeness and sense for drama is also obvious in the way he arranges his life to support the message conveyed in his texts: first, in assuming the character of a frivolous aesthete and, then, in provoking a mob persecution to underscore the heterogeneity of the religious with this world. It seems that in the latter case Kierkegaard has even acted according to a ready-made script. He explains to us that he was “rigorously brought up from childhood in the view that the truth must suffer, be insulted and mocked”; long before he had himself seen it, he had learned that “lies and baseness and injustice ruled the world.” Hence, as an “essentially religious author” he had to arrange things so that he became persecuted and scorned.

All this makes it appear that in Kierkegaard we have a sovereign super artist; such, indeed, that the Romantic ironists could have

1746 See PV, 81 / SV1 XIII, 566.
1748 See PV, 87 / SV1 XIII, 571–572.
1750 PV, 62–63 / SV1 XIII, 548–549.
only dreamt about. However, Kierkegaard’s account ultimately sublates this illusory impression. From the first part of both *On My Work as an Author* and *The Point of View* the reader does receive the impression that Kierkegaard’s action was based on his autonomous will and reason, i.e. on the premeditated and consequently implemented plan of his. If this were the whole truth, Kierkegaard would truly have been a super artist, a superhuman artist. However, the latter part of both texts reveal that it was not really so. Kierkegaard gives a double or, in fact, a triple account of his authorship. First, he presents his authorship as a consequent implementation of a premeditated plan of his. But, second, he revokes, or at least revises, his account by explaining that the action was dictated by circumstances, that he did not have an overview of the whole in the beginning, and did not really know what he was doing. Finally, he concludes that he was acting like a puppet under the direction of Governance: in fact, the authorship was both planned and carried out by Governance, all of it.\(^{1752}\)

Kierkegaard has, for example, two explanations for the “duplicity” (*Duplicitet*) of his authorship: for the fact that the authorship was aesthetic and religious at the same time. First, he explains this duplicity teleologically. The aesthetic production was a cunning device that served a maieutic plan of a religious author; it was a deception that deceived his aesthetic readers directly into religious truth, so that they had to become aware of it.\(^{1754}\) However, having pointed out to his reader that this is how it was and how it had to be, Kierkegaard gives another explanation for the duplicity, a causal one. He admits that it was not entirely true that the aesthetic production was just a deliberate deception, in fact, it was

\(^{1753}\) So in *PV*, 12 and 71–90 / *SV1* XIII, 500 and 556–575.
also “a necessary emptying.” What explains the duplicity of the whole authorship now is a certain “double fact” in the story of his life. With his rigorous Christian upbringing, his incurable depression, and his already made decision to use his life in doing penance, Kierkegaard fell in love with Regine Olsen with the result that he became a poet and experienced a religious awakening simultaneously. In consequence of this double fact, he began his career as an author “in two places” at the same time. The poetic element in him had to be purged, and he therefore began his aesthetic writing with Either/Or; but the religious already had the upper hand in his spirit, and that became visible in his religious authorship and in the direction of the authorship as a whole. In opposition to the ideal, teleological explanation, here we have a realistic, natural one. Similarly, Kierkegaard describes, first, how he deliberately provoked Corsaren to attack him and to arouse the mob persecution to serve the right understanding of his religious authorship. But he later explains that the persecution by the “simple class” came unexpectedly for him and gave him “the opportunity to experience what one can never really believe without having experienced it, this Christian scale: that love is hated.” Now he explains the event to himself and to his reader as a necessary addition to his own Christian upbringing: it was Governance that had assisted him so that the outcome of what he did truly benefited him and his cause.

But, ultimately, Kierkegaard has recourse not only to two, but to three types of explanations. There are the ethical, teleological ex-

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1755 *PV*, 77 / SV1 XIII, 562.
1756 *PV*, 84 / SV1 XIII, 568–569, together with *PV*, 79–84 / SV1 XIII, 564–568.
1758 *PV*, 66–67 / SV1 XIII, 552–553.
1759 *PV*, 90 / SV1 XIII, 574.
1760 *PV*, 89–90 / SV1 XIII, 574.
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explanations: because Kierkegaard had such-and-such good purpose, as a reflective subject he decided to carry out such-and-such actions in the given historical situation. There are the natural, causal explanations: because of his upbringing, his background, his depression, and his historical and social circumstances, he was bound to act as he did. But, finally, there is the religious, overall explanation: it was Governance that forced him and directed him through natural, psychological, historical, and social circumstances to fulfill the purpose it had for him. Within the framework of this third explanation a synthesis of the other explanations takes place. It is Governance that governs actuality in its totality and also directs Kierkegaard so that he actualizes an ideal possibility and acts out of necessity at one and the same time. From his religious, total point of view, he sees that “what his task was to do” and “what he could not help but do” were, in the end, the same. He sees that his purpose was determined in advance by Governance and that Governance also directed and helped him to fulfill that purpose. Therefore, he writes, for example, that there was nothing meritorious in that he “became (indeed, was constrained to become) a spy.” Apparently, it is also due to Governance that, by fulfilling his calling in the historical world, Kierkegaard becomes brought up as a spirit. It is due to Governance that his inner need and what the time and his neighbors needed demanded the same actions from him.

But, if this religious overall interpretation is assumed and the Romantic notion of the godlike super artist is given up, what happens to the poetical? Is the idea that all one’s actions are determined by Governance not a boring and extremely unpoetical one? Where is there room for the creative freedom of a poetic subject anymore, room for the free will that soars high and takes risks?

1761 PV, 89 n / SV 1 XIII, 573 n.
1762 I owe these questions to Kierkegaard scholar Leo Stan. But Kierkegaard also suggests the questions himself; see PV, 91–92 / SV 1 XIII, 576–577.
First of all, the presence of the infinite and eternal in life might still be considered poetical in that it opens up a higher dimension into the historical actuality. Second, although everything is governed by Governance and all action in its totality is orchestrated by Governance, the individual subject follows the directions of Governance freely. According to Kierkegaard, Governance does not force him as fate does, but brings him up lovingly. It is a kind of love affair, and as Climacus points out in *Philosophical Fragments*, love affairs are usually considered as poetic. Third, the individual is the one that interprets what the will of Governance with respect to him is, and in this he runs a risk. While he considers his individual life from the point of view of eternity and acts on basis of his imaginative interpretation, he has no way to check that this interpretation is the correct one. Thus, a religious “fantasist” like Kierkegaard, indeed, soars high and takes risks compared to which the artistic experiments of the Romantic ironist are mere child’s play. As a modern, reflecting person, Kierkegaard was bound to understand that his interpretation might be pure fantasy and yet it brought him into a painful conflict with his contemporaries.

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1764 As noticed above, Kierkegaard acknowledges this himself as he writes that he has no “immediate God-relationship to appeal to” and that his relation to God is “a relationship of reflection.” (*PV*, 74 / *SV1* XIII, 559.)
1765 Kierkegaard writes about his uncertainty and his burden of responsibility in *PV*, 72 n / *SV1* XIII, 557 n. The fact that there is always a risk involved in religious interpretations of the historical actuality was pointed out by Climacus in the “Interlude” of *Philosophical Fragments*. (See subdivision 5.1.2 above.) Kierkegaard comes back to this at the end of *Armed Neutrality*. He writes that, perhaps, it is possible to know definitely what it is to be a Christian, but “whether one oneself is that cannot be known...it must be believed, and in faith there is always fear and trembling (*PV*, 141 / *Pap*. X 5 B 107, p. 301.).” By implication, there is also risk and fear and trembling in attempting to follow the directions of Governance.
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The painful conflict itself, too, might have existed mostly in Kierkegaard’s fantasy. Be that as it may, Kierkegaard at least assumed that from the worldly and sagacious point of view of his commonsensical contemporaries his work and life as an author appeared to be either tremendous pride or a kind of madness.\textsuperscript{1766} The moral of his authorship was, after all, that \textit{worldly sagacity should be renounced} by those who serve Christianity, i.e. by all Christians, but especially by their spiritual leaders. Instead of acting as the apologists and “the princes of the Church” had acted through centuries—instead of getting, with the help of worldly sagacity, as many people as possible to accept Christianity—Kierkegaard wanted to dispel the cunning illusions and compromises of Christendom.\textsuperscript{1767} He writes that he wanted “to make clear what in truth Christianity’s requirement is, even if not one single person would accept it.”\textsuperscript{1768} Although this was needed because the prerequisite for the right acceptance of grace was “that the infinite requirement is heard and affirmed,”\textsuperscript{1769} we may be sure that Kierkegaard’s imprudent strategy would still be considered as poetic frenzy by many a sagacious Christian.

Hence, we may conclude that there is a strong presence of the poetical in Kierkegaard’s life and life-view as described in his texts on his work as an author.

8.4 Living Poetically in the Age of Reflection

Above it has been shown that the ideal of living poetically works as a determining principle not only in Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1766] See, for example, \textit{PV}, 20, 67, 95–96, and 103 / \textit{SV1} XIII, 509, 553, 580–581, and 589.
\item[1768] \textit{PV}, 16 / \textit{SV1} XIII, 506.
\item[1769] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
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authorship, but also in his texts on his work as an author. If there is any truth in these texts, we may conclude that Kierkegaard also held onto this ideal in his own life, and even if the texts were more or less pure fiction, it still remains true that Kierkegaard interpreted his life in accordance with this ideal. In conclusion, let us consider what these texts add to our understanding of the ideal of living poetically and how they further clarify Kierkegaard’s view on human situatedness.

First of all, these texts bring into focus modern Christendom and, thereby, clarify the role of reflection in human situatedness. Kierkegaard tells us that his entire authorship is polemically related to the illusion of Christendom.\textsuperscript{1770} That Christendom is an illusion manifests in the fact that “Christians” in modern Christendom have their lives in worldly considerations and never considering that “their lives should have some duty to God.”\textsuperscript{1771} But more fundamentally the illusion consists of illusory reflection. According to Kierkegaard, “Christendom” itself is “a reflection-category” (\textit{en Reflexions-Bestemmelse}).\textsuperscript{1772} First, a nation is determined as Christian in reflection and this is confirmed by symbolic practices. Then, the inhabitants of that nation delude themselves into thinking that they are Christians just because they have been born and brought up in this “Christian” nation. This illusion is essentially an illusory notion of human situatedness. First, the illusion is that human beings could fix their historical and social situation once and for all. Second, the illusion is that this historical and social situation could mechanically affect their free spirits just like nature determines creatures of nature.\textsuperscript{1773}

\textsuperscript{1770} PV, 8, esp. n.2, and 23 / SVI XIII, 496, esp. n.3, and 517–518.
\textsuperscript{1771} PV, 41 / SVI XIII, 529–530.
\textsuperscript{1772} See PV, 52 / SVI XIII, 539.
\textsuperscript{1773} Against this illusory notion Climacus already argued in Philosophical Fragments (see PF, 95–98 / SVI IV, 258–261).
But if this “naturalistic” notion of human situatedness is an erroneous one, what would then be the correct notion? As we have seen, according to Kierkegaard, an individual human being should always situate himself in this world through his personal relation to the eternal and infinite. The individual is, indeed, affected by his given historical and social situation, but this situation does not determine his being either magically (through some external events in the objective world) or intellectually (through an intellectual appropriation of some objective truths). To be baptized and to receive the appropriate catechesis on orthodox Christian doctrines do not automatically make the individual a Christian. The single individual must always appropriate what is given in his situation through his personal relation to the infinite and eternal, and here passion, imagination, ethical will, and faith play essential role. In other words, Christendom as such does not make anyone into a Christian without his subjective ethical-religious activity.

However, it is clear that reflection also plays an indispensable role in human situatedness and in living poetically. It is hard to imagine what social and historical situations there were to appropriate through ethical-religious passion and imagination, if reflection did not relate ideas to the phenomena of the sensible world in the first place. The problem in Christendom is just that reflection is separated from the total ethical-religious activity of the subject. In the modern age, in the “age of reflection,” such abstract, amoral reflection tends to become immoral in the hands of envy and threatens to disintegrate society. However, in Two Ages, where the age of reflection is analyzed, Kierkegaard does not suppress or excommunicate reflection. Instead, he brings in Socrates, who was certainly a friend of reflection, but who also had infinite

\[1774\] Cf. the end of the unpublished manuscript Johannes Climacus, where Climacus reasons that reflection that relates ideality with reality is the possibility of the relation established by spirit (Aand). (PF, 168–170 / Pap. IV B 1, pp. 146–148.)
ethical enthusiasm. Accordingly, in *The Point of View* he main-
tains that, precisely because reflection cannot be avoided in mod-
ern Christendom, the Socratic maieutics is needed in making men
again into Christians.\footnote{PV, 54–55 / SV1 XIII, 541–542.}

Reflection thus plays an indispensable part both in living poeti-
cally and in modern situatedness. In *Either/Or* and in *Postscript*,
reflection was already given a tacit justification as a moment in
ethical-religious life. In line with these works, Kierkegaard points
out in *Two Ages* that “reflection itself is not something perni-
cious.” Reflection means a gain “in extensity” and also “the pre-
requisite for acting more intensively is the thorough kneading of
reflection”: when one perceives through reflection what is the
most prudent thing to do, but rejects it, then one gains the inten-
sity of “infinite enthusiasm.”\footnote{TA, 110–111 / SV1 VIII, 103.} In *Two Ages* and in “The Single
Individual” the need for combining reflection with individual
ethical-religious passion is also explained with reference to modern
political development. This development is oriented towards free-
dom and equality but, according to Kierkegaard, threatens to lead
into a tyranny of the impersonal crowd. Here, again, Socrates gives
us a worthy model. As the development is towards democracy, it
would be desirable that all individuals would become responsible
citizens like Socrates was. Kierkegaard claims that the events of
1848 show that his Socratic and Christian category of “the single
individual” was introduced at the right time.

In addition to clarifying modern Christendom and the role of
reflection in human situatedness, the texts treated in this chapter
present us with a concrete case of an attempt at living poetically.
By depicting the life of the real, historical human being that was
Søren Kierkegaard, they give us a sense of how complicated things
are in actual life. Kierkegaard’s account shows how complex and
imperfect his personal striving to actualize the ethical-religious ideal was. Aesthetic, ethical, and Christian motives were operating side by side with each other so that it is impossible to judge which type of motive was in the end the dominating one.\textsuperscript{1777}

Kierkegaard also points out that he falls short of being a truth-witness, that is, a person whose personal existence expresses what he has said. He maintains that he has made an attempt at expressing what it is to be the single individual. He has “associated with countless people, but always stood alone” and he has “made more than one sacrifice, exposed himself to one and another danger.” But in other respects he has fallen short both of the Christian and the ethical ideal of the single individual. For example, he has “not been obliged to work for a living” and he has “been too much of a poet to dare to be called a truth-witness in the stricter sense.”\textsuperscript{1778} In consequence, Kierkegaard does not declare himself to be a Christian. The most he is able to say is: “I trust to God that I am a Christian; I believe that out of grace he will accept me as a Christian...”\textsuperscript{1779} Thus, Kierkegaard ultimately relies on Governance and grace. Through faith in these, he keeps hanging on to the ideal that he knows himself to fall short of.

Analyzing Judge William’s position above in subdivision 3.2.3, we saw that the idea of insurmountable sinfulness did not make Judge William give up his ethical-religious project of living poetically. The universal ethical ideal remained the same, there was just

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\textsuperscript{1777} In his biography SAK (2000), Joakim Garff as a rule picks up the aesthetic motives and explains Kierkegaard’s undertaking with reference to them. This is, of course, possible and, perhaps, just as justified as underscoring the “high” ethical-religious motives and using them as fundamental explanations, as many other Kierkegaard biographers have done (see, for example, Lowrie 1938 and Hohlenberg 1940). It just remains to be noted that the aesthetic explanation has been made possible by Kierkegaard himself and that he has been aware of its possibility and taken it into account in his overall thought.
\textsuperscript{1778} PV, 119–120 / SVI XIII, 605–606.
\textsuperscript{1779} PV, 134–135 / Pap. X 5 B 107, p. 294.
\end{flushleft}
a new task added to it: to assume the right ethical attitude to one's imperfections. Ethical striving became qualified by infinite repentance that had as its object the actuality of sin. Later, in chapters 4 and 5, we saw how the actuality of sin, according to Climacus and Haufniensis, turned out to be a fatal obstacle for the project of a self-relying ethical subject to live poetically. However, with the help of grace and Governance the fatality of sin is overcome so that, whatever the inherited sin and the sins personally committed, the single individual may keep striving.

In the Christian project of living poetically relation to the absolute is in this way combined with a tolerance to relativity: there is an absolute truth and an absolute ethical demand, but they are mediated by historical actuality and grace. Kierkegaard writes in his *Journals and Papers* from 1854:

> As soon as the question of a man’s eternal salvation is made commensurable with a decision in time by a relation to something historical occurring in time, the nightmare comes at once, the torments of sympathy, that there will be countless millions who will not be eternally saved…
>
> The more exactly the terms of salvation are stipulated, the fewer there always are who one can believe will be saved. But sympathy finds it tormenting to be saved in contradistinction to others.
>
> So I have interpreted it as follows: the terms of salvation differ for every individual, for every single solitary human being. There is a universal proclamation of Christianity, but with respect to the conditions of salvation every single individual must relate to God as a single individual.
>
> This is undeniably a sympathetic relief; that which to me is so crucial that for me the terms of salvation are bound up with it—I understand this to pertain only to me and that the terms of salvation for every other individual are different.\footnote{JP 4, 4922 / Pap. XI 1 A 296.}
From the principle that “the terms of salvation differ for every individual,” it follows that the Christian ideal of living poetically matches to every single individual in a singular way. It also follows that it is possible to cling on to the Christian ideal, even if one clearly falls short of it.
9 “Living Poetically” and Kierkegaard Research

In this last chapter a first step from the exegesis of Kierkegaard’s texts is taken into the explication and evaluation of the ideal we have discovered through it. The purpose of this summarizing chapter is to provide a preliminary systematic analysis of Kierkegaard’s ideal of living poetically: to go through its constituents and to outline how they function as a whole (subdivision 9.1). Second, the purpose is also to outline how the research at hand relates to the research of other Kierkegaard scholars (subdivision 9.2). My aim is just to give some structure to the ideal of living poetically and to establish in a preliminary way the connections to the research literature I have become acquainted with while preparing my own thesis on Kierkegaard. More detailed and comprehensive analyses of the ideal and more detailed discussions with the research literature I shall leave for possible future studies.

9.1 Systematic Analysis of Living Poetically

In this study the ideal of living poetically has been considered as an ideal through which the Kierkegaardian subject situates himself in his historical and social context. However, a systematic analysis of living poetically is best begun by considering the human subject itself. We shall first consider how the subject is constituted according to Kierkegaard (subdivision 9.1.1) and what capacities it has for living poetically (9.1.2). Then, we shall consider the life-views with the help of which the subject may orient himself in the given actuality (9.1.3). Then we shall investigate how the Kierkegaardian subject in practice situates himself in the historical and
social actuality (9.1.4). Last, we shall analyze the (anti)political policy (9.1.5) and the view of life as a drama governed by God (9.1.6) that play essential roles in Kierkegaard’s ethical-religious and Christian ideals of living poetically. The aim of the systematic analysis is to construct a whole that Kierkegaard never explicited, but that he could have explicited and recognized as his own inasmuch as it is implied in his writings.

9.1.1 A Synthesis Sustained by Spirit

The synthesis structure constituted and sustained by spirit, i.e. the structure of human self, is a central topic of Kierkegaard research.1781 Let us investigate what is its significance for living poetically.

As Climacus noted in *Postscript*, a human being may be considered objectively, like one considers a potato and other material objects of nature. A human being may also be considered objectively by considering the idea of human being, i.e. the general form common to these particular objects, which our intellect may comprehend.1782 For living poetically it is essential, however, that a human being considers himself also and above all in the first person singular, i.e. as a subject or a self. As a self a human being is a spirit, and as a spirit he is a relation that relates to itself as it relates the body to the soul, the finite to the infinite, the temporal to the eternal, and necessity to freedom.1783 What does this mean with respect to living poetically? It means, first of all, that we, who try

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1781 For discussions on the synthesis structure that Kierkegaard operates with, see, for example *Lindström* 1943, 44–93; *Theunissen* 1981; *Liehu* 1990, 43–61; *Come* 1995, 3–45; *Gron* 1993, 19–23, and *Gron* 1997, 57–76.


1783 See, for example, *EO2*, 42–46, 60, 215, 222–223, and 250–251 / *SVI* II, 39–43, 55, 193, 199–200, and 225; *CA*, 85 and 88 / *SVI* IV, 355 and 358; *CUP*, 92–93 and 221 / *SVI* VII, 73 and 185; and *SUD*, 13 / *SVI* XI, 127.
to live poetically, are finite corporeal beings that live in this finite material and changeable world. In this world and in ourselves things take place mostly without regard to our wishes, that is, necessarily. But, while we live in this material and changeable world, we are aware of something unchangeable that transcends it, i.e. something eternal and infinite. This awareness lifts us above the finite and temporal actuality and makes it possible for us to structure it and to anticipate that there are also other possibilities than those actualized in it, and this is the basis of living poetically.

But what does Kierkegaard mean by “finitude” and “infini-
tude” and “temporality” and “eternity,” and how does he define “freedom” and “necessity”? In fact Kierkegaard nowhere defines these terms. However, we may define them on the basis of his use. In his texts “finitude” refers both to the human body and to the given material and historical world, which limits and structures human existence, but which human beings also structure with their categories, imagination, and deeds.1784 “Infini-
tude” refers to what lies beyond the finite and to what is capable of transcending all finitude: for example, to the infinity of imagined possibilities,1785 but more primarily to the unlimited and indefatigable power of spirit such as it manifests, for example, in love that overcomes wrath, in ethical duty, and in the power of imagination itself.1786 “Temporality” refers to the structure of time as experienced by human beings, i.e. to the past, present, and future,1787 which also makes up the dimension in which human existence

1784 See *Come* 1995, 32–40.
1786 See *CI*, 297–298 / *SV1* XIII, 366–367; *EO2*, 60–61 and 266 / *SV1* II, 55–56 and 259; *CUP*, 201 and 244–245 / *SV1* VII, 168 and 205–206; and SUD, 31 / *SV1* XI, 144.
1787 See *CA*, 89 / *SV1* IV, 359.
unfolds itself. "Eternity" refers to the realm of the eternal that is immune to change and eternally present, but also to the eternal duration and to what awaits us at the end of temporality. "Freedom" refers to the original human freedom that overcomes the given and makes free choices. But freedom refers also to the “positive freedom” or “true freedom” that results, if the human being through right choices, love, and faith becomes himself and fulfills his purpose in historical and social actuality in harmony with the will of that power that sustains all being. Finally, “necessity” refers to the factual necessity which characterizes life in finitude, to the logical necessity, which rules in the realm of concepts, and to God’s particular will with respect to individuals.

In Kierkegaard research it is, in fact, often passed over in silence what Kierkegaard means by “the eternal” and “the infinite,” by “freedom” and “necessity.” If I am correct, this negligence is actually partly warranted. Meanings that these primary dimensions of human existence receive cannot be fixed once and for all, since they depend on the human being’s mode of existence and on the

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1788 See, for example, CUP, 206, 397, and 491 / SVI VII, 172, 344, and 427.
1790 Grøn 1993, 83–85; EO2, 215 and 223 / SVI II, 193 and 200; PF, 75 / SVI IV, 238–239; CA, 21 and 42 / SVI IV, 294 and 313.
1792 EO2, 174 and 250 / SVI II, 158 and 224; and SUD, 68 / SVI XI, 179.
1793 EO2, 174 / SVI II, 158; and PF, 41–42 n and 74–75 / SVI IV, 208–209 n and 237–238.
way he interprets life. In other words, for Kierkegaard finitude and temporality, infinity and eternity are real dimensions of human existence, and freedom and necessity are its real constituents. These are primary givens of human existence. But how these dimensions and constituents are further conceptualized seems to be open to various interpretations. For ancient Greeks the eternal referred to a host of gods and deities. For Plato the eternal consisted of eternal ideas. For a Christian the eternal is God such as revealed to us in Christ. Only the dimension of eternity common to all these different interpretations is given.

When we investigate Kierkegaard’s works, “the eternal” and “the infinite,” “freedom” and “possibility” receive various content depending on the point of view. For example, in the irony described in The Concept of Irony the eternal and infinite are empty. They are defined only negatively, i.e. through a negation of the temporal and finite. In the ethical existence described in Either/Or, Part II, love, the absolute Good, and God come to occupy the realm of the eternal and infinite. In Philosophical Fragments the eternal God first appears to a Socratic philosopher as the Unknown, but becomes revealed for the person who believes in Christ in his divine and self-sacrificing love. Thus, if we ask for Kierkegaard’s overall philosophical view with regard to the content of eternity and infinitude, it seems to be that the dimensions of eternity and infinitude are there as realities, but they are receptive to various interpretations that depend both on the human subject and on what he comes to experience in his life. Similarly with “freedom” and “necessity.” What Judge William means by “freedom” (the self-realization of the ethical spirit) is different from what Climacus, Vigilius, and Anti-Climacus mean by it (salvation and grounding one’s existence in God’s will through Christ). How “necessity” is understood in Philosophical Fragments (the sphere of eternal truths of logic) differs from how it is understood in The Sickness unto Death (the necessity in one’s life, the
limitations pertaining to one’s finitude, to which one must submit). Thus, every pseudonym, every subjective thinker seems to have the poetic freedom to attach meanings to these basic dimensions and constituents of existence.

As a Christian thinker, however, Kierkegaard himself assumes that the eternal and infinite ground of everything is God, who sustains all being, including the human spirit. This means that God is also the one who establishes and sustains the basic human synthesis: from eternity he establishes the relation between the body and the soul, the temporal and the eternal, etc., and from eternity he sustains it at every moment. But at the same time God gives to the human individual freedom to decide how he synthesizes the opposing terms. In other words, in human life what pertains to the soul is continually related to what pertains to the body, the infinite is related to the finite, the eternal to the temporal, and the possible to the actual. “That” this takes place in his life is not in the power of human individual, for human spirit is this relation and the individual cannot help but be this relation. However, the “how” of the human synthesis is to a certain extent in his power, although not completely, since his state is that of sin, i.e. unfreedom, and since, on the other hand, complete freedom would equal existing with the help of God the way God wills.1795

Let us now try to recapitulate how the possibility of living poetically resides in the “essence” of human being, i.e. in the human synthesis sustained by spirit. First, it was noticed that the human spirit that relates to the infinite and eternal has the capacity to transcend what is given in time and space and, thus, has the poetic freedom to mould, restructure, and develop the given. Second, it was noticed that the human spirit has the poetic freedom to give also structure to the basic dimension and constituents of its existence, that

1795 This paragraph is an abbreviation and simplification of what one may learn by reading Arne Grøn’s Subjektivitet og negativitet: Kierkegaard (1997).
is, to interpret the eternal and infinite and to conceive freedom and necessity according to its will and imagination. Third, the possibility and need of living poetically resides in the fragility and uncertainty of finite human existence. Existing in the changeable material world the human individual is affected by the events of this world: as corporeal and sensing being, the human individual is constantly moved and changing, whether he wills it or not. Moreover, the events of the temporal and material world also change the conditions of his existence, whether he likes it or not. Even though he may raise himself above these changes through reflection and conceive regularity in the events of the world, he remains at the mercy of accidental events and, for example, his death is possible at every moment of time. This means that prudent calculation and scientific reflection of the structure of life has its limits in mastering life and there remains always room, and even need if the person has not become spiritless or demonic, for poetic ethical-religious attempts to come to terms with life by grounding it in the eternal and infinite.

Fourth, the possibility of living poetically resides in the inalienable freedom of the human spirit. As was noticed above, as a relation that relates to each other body and soul, finitude and infinitude, temporality and eternity, necessity and freedom, the human spirit is at least partially free. “That” a human spirit is related to the body and the soul, finitude and infinitude, etc., determines only that the spirit cannot avoid realizing itself in this way or that. But the way, the “how” of the realization, of the synthesis, is free, is a matter of “art.” A human individual may attempt to realize ethically the eternal in his temporal existence and religiously he may let himself be governed by God. But he may as well forget himself in the enjoyable contemplation of eternal ideas and struc-

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1796 See Grøn 1993, 14–19.
1797 See, for example, CUP, 86 / SV1 VII, 67–68.
tures of thought, or he may enjoy aesthetically the multifarious forms of life, art, philosophy, and religion without binding his personal existence to any of them. Nothing determines the spirit existing in this way rather than that, even if as a result of a defiant and sinful synthesis the individual is plagued by anxiety and despair. Its existence is and remains its own work of art that it creates either consciously or unconsciously, either authentically or by following.

Fifth, the possibility of living poetically is based on the will of the Creator that has pre-established the human synthesis. Accordingly, the relation to the eternal and infinite already gives shape to human existence before the self-conscious activity of human spirit. Moreover, the relation does not exist only through the activity of autonomous human reason and will. In the concrete existence of a human individual the eternal and infinite are already anticipated in passion and imagination, when reason starts to work, and these become truly present in human existence not through reason, but through faith. Let us next have a look at these poetic elements of living poetically—at imagination, passion, will, and faith.

### 9.1.2 Elements of Subjectivity

As was noticed in chapter 4 above, in Postscript Climacus posits as an ideal “the contemporaneity of the particular elements of subjectivity in the existing individual.” In science and scholarship thinking and knowing dominate over other activities that belong to existence, for example, over imagination, love, and faith. However, in actual existence thinking should not be superior but coordinate with other elements of subjectivity. In other words, reason and

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1799 CUP, 343–347 / SV1 VII, 297–300.
understanding are not to be detached from the more subjective faculties of human soul and reason is not to act as a sovereign ruler in human existence. Rather, its task is to communicate and cooperate with its equals. Reason is, namely, not the privileged, divine faculty that truly relates the human being to the eternal and infinite reality, while imagination, passion, will, and faith remain bound to the relativism of sensuous and aesthetic existence. Imagination, passion, and will (that is informed by imagination and passion), and faith (that is informed by imagination, passion, and will) play a decisive role in relating the concrete human being to what transcends the phenomenal world. Consequently, these faculties do not belong only to the aesthetic existence, but are also very much needed in the ethical and religious existence. Let us make a brief survey of their functions.

**Imagination** is the capacity that makes it possible for the human spirit to take leave of his immediate existence and of the given historical and social actuality that determines it. With the help of imagination one may assume different roles and self-identities.\(^ {1800}\) More generally, imagination opens up an infinite realm of timeless possibilities and through imagination the human being also reflects and understands the finite and temporal world. With the help of imagination the human mind constructs the concepts it uses, reflects both objective and subjective actuality, and reflects the present but also the past and the future. Thus, without imagination there would be no reflection and the human being could form neither a conception of himself nor a life-view.\(^ {1801}\)

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\(^ {1800}\) That is the case in Romantic irony described in *The Concept of Irony* (see subdivision 1.2 above), but according to *The Sickness unto Death* such an “infinite moving away from itself in the infinitizing of the self” is part of the development of every human self (cf. *SUD*, 30 / *SVI* XI, 143 and *R*, 154–156 / *SVI* III, 194–195).

\(^ {1801}\) See *SUD*, 30–31 / *SVI* XI, 144; and Gouwens 1989, 144–156 and 207–208.
When the aesthetic existence becomes qualified by self-consciousness, the person becomes aware of the power of his imagination and may try to use it actively for living poetically as the Romantic ironist did. Playing with his imagination he may try to create his life anew in order to derive maximum aesthetic enjoyment from it. In contrast, the person that lives in the ethical-religious way lets the eternal and infinite ideality that he apprehends in his imagination govern his existence in the changeable world. Imagination also plays an essential role in the Christian existence, although Kierkegaard criticizes such Christianity that amounts to no more than fantasy and maintains that the Incarnation is ultimately incomprehensible to the imagination. As David J. Gouwens has argued, imagination is needed in apprehending Christ through poetic analogies, in creating the situation of contemporaneity with Christ, and in the imitation of Christ in the given actuality.

Passions, especially the passion of love, have been a topic of intensive research in recent Kierkegaard scholarship. With “passion” (Lidenskab) Kierkegaard refers to the deep, lasting emotions that have their ground in the juxtaposition of the infinite with the finite, of the temporal actuality with the timeless, ideal possibility, and of the factual necessity with the quest for freedom. Passions are related to imagination inasmuch as they are awakened by imagined possibilities and by their juxtaposition with

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1802 The master of such imaginative entertaining of possibilities is the author of the papers collected in *Either/Or*, Part I.
1803 See subdivision 3.1 above.
1806 *CUP*, 92 and 311–312 / *SV* VII, 73 and 267.
the given actuality. But, on the other hand, passions make the imagination cherish particular possibilities and to ignore others.

In the aesthetic sphere, erotic seduction awakens vague images in the seduced that excite him and arouse erotic passion and anxiety in him. In approaching the ethical sphere the individual becomes passionate, when he conceives the possibility of a dutiful life and anticipates that he, too, could realize this universal possibility in the historically given world. In actual ethical life, then, passion aims to transform the actual, concrete, and social self in accordance with the ideal. In the religious sphere the absolute worship for God and the passion for eternal happiness transform the entire existence of the religious person. Finally, in the Christian sphere the passion of faith “sharpens” the religious passion by directing it, paradoxically, to a particular historical event and person.

Passions do not inspire only thought and imagination, but also action. In the aesthetic sphere, the depressed and anxious emperor Nero becomes fearful of human beings and burns Rome.

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1807 See Ferreira 1991, 5, 10.
1808 See, for example, WL, 280–299 / SV1 IX, 267–285.
1809 “Diary of the Seducer” in Either/Or, Part I, may be read as a study on the dialectic of aesthetic passions.
1810 See, for example, EO2, 266–270 / SV1 II, 239–242 and FT, 57 / SV1 III, 107–108.
1811 Such ethical passion is exemplified by Judge William in Either/Or, Part II, and analyzed conceptually by Johannes Climacus in Concluding Unscientific Postscript.
the other hand, possessed by erotic love Donna Elvira falls for Don Giovanni and, unable to acknowledge the deception, runs after him wherever he goes. In the ethical sphere, “the first love” makes the bride and bridegroom become earnest and makes them avow faithfulness to each other before God; then, in marriage “the marital love” overcomes all the obstacles it meets. In the Christian sphere the offended person turns down the gift of Christ, will not recognize him, scorns and crucifies him. But the person, who follows the paradoxical passion of his understanding and surrenders himself to the passion of faith and love that Christ communicates to him, wills to confess his faith and love, and willingly follows Christ into suffering and persecution also in the external world.

In what is stated so far, it is already implied that imagination and passion inform and nourish the will. But again it is also the other way around: will also informs imagination and sustains passion. As Judge William notes, the ethical intention consolidates love and the actualization of the ethical will in the individual makes him see all life as a beautiful struggle towards the good.

On the other hand, ignorance of the good also has its roots in willing. As Anti-Climacus points out, the lack of will makes imagination and understanding blind to the good.

In harmony with this, Anti-Climacus claims also that Christianly “you shall believe in the forgiveness of sins,” and that “Christianity says to each individual: You shall believe—that is, either you shall be offended or

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1815 EO1, 190–196 / SV1 I, 167–172.
1816 See subdivision 3.1.1 above.
1819 SUD, 95 / SV1 XI, 206.
you shall believe." In other words, faith involves willing and it is a duty. The formula for faith that Anti-Climacus uses to measure our distance from faith confirms this. The formula for the state of faith is: “in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it.”

The view of Anti-Climacus contradicts with the statement that Climacus makes in *Philosophical Fragments* that faith is a passion and “not an act of will.” However, it harmonizes with the statement of Climacus that immediately follows. According to Climacus willing is efficacious “within the condition,” i.e. when the passion of faith has been donated to the individual. To interpret, the passion of faith transforms the will, but then it is (at least partly) a matter of willing whether the person confirms this passion and holds to it and to the images that go with it or not. The interplay of imagination, passion, and will in the life that follows coming into faith is clearly outlined by Anti-Climacus in *Practice in Christianity*. However, it may be claimed on the basis of Kierkegaard’s own texts that coming into faith also involves the individual’s own decision and activity, i.e. will, and imagination that connects the idea of God to a certain historical person and to certain subjective experiences. As M. Jamie Ferreira has suggested, the overall picture Kierkegaard gives of coming into is a picture of a complex event, in which all the elements of subjectivity—imagination, passion, will, and thinking—are involved simultaneously.

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1821 *SUD*, 49 and 131 / *SV1* XI, 160 and 241. (Italics have been added and translation has been slightly altered.)
1824 See Ferreira 1991.
Climacus maintains in Postscript that whereas in science and scholarship thinking and knowing dominate over the subjective human faculties, in ethical and religious existence thinking and knowing should be coordinated with imagination, passion, will, and faith. In accordance with this, Kierkegaard uses in The Concept of Irony the expression “living poetically” to refer to the forms of ethical-religious existence. In this respect he sides with the Romantic ironists both against prudent practical calculation and against abstract philosophical speculation. Openness to imagination and passion distinguishes the ideal of living poetically both from the bourgeois and from the philosophical ideals of “living reasonably.” However, respect for imagination and passion does not thereby imply an unreasonable neglect of the given historical actuality. In this respect Kierkegaard’s ethical-religious ideal aspires to distinguish itself from the project of the Romantics. In Kierkegaard’s ideal, reliance on imagination and passion does not mean an escape from finitude and necessity into realms of infinitude and possibility inasmuch as imagination and passion are guided by ethical will, repentance, and faith that direct the subject back to the given historical actuality. Neither does it mean giving up consistent consideration of the totality, in which the subject is situated. The ethical-religious and Christian subjects have their respective life-views, on the basis of which they orientate themselves in life.

9.1.3 Life-Views

In The Concept of Irony Kierkegaard claims that in order to master irony in his life the individual needs “a totality-view of the world.” He writes that “true earnestness is possible only in a totality in which the subject...feels the task to be something that

1825 CI, 325 / SVI XIII, 389.
he has not assigned to himself but that has been assigned to him," and he criticizes Socrates for lacking such a totality-view.\footnote{CI, 235 / SV1 XIII, 311.} Nine years after the publication of his dissertation Kierkegaard returns to this passage in his \textit{Journals and Papers}. He writes:

Influenced as I was by Hegel and whatever was modern, without the maturity really to comprehend greatness, I could not resist pointing out somewhere in my dissertation that it was a defect on the part of Socrates to disregard the whole and only consider numerically the individuals.

What a Hegelian fool I was! It is precisely this that powerfully demonstrates what a great ethicist Socrates was:\footnote{JP 4, 4281 / Pap. X 3 A 477.}

This statement could be understood as denying the need for totality-views in ethical-religious life. However, what Kierkegaard opposes here is probably just that the individual should subdue himself under some totality, for example under the state, in such way that he thereby neglects his personal God-relationship. The presence of consequent totality-views is so clear in the works that follow the dissertation that Kierkegaard could not possibly deny their significance. In \textit{Either/Or}, in \textit{The Concept of Anxiety}, in \textit{Philosophical Fragments}, in \textit{Concluding Unscientific Postscript}, in \textit{The Sickness unto Death}, in \textit{Practice in Christianity}, and in \textit{The Point of View}, in all these works consideration of individuals goes hand in hand with views of the whole, in which the individuals are involved.

It is as clear, however, that the totality-views that figure in Kierkegaard’s texts are not constructed scientifically, as the Hegelian system was claimed to be. Neither are they abstract or objective in the sense that they would claim to be totally free from all subjective elements. In \textit{From the Papers of One Still Living} Kierkegaard gives an apt characterization of the type of totality-view that
he operates with in his works. He calls it a *life-view* and explains that

a life-view is more than a quintessence or a sum of propositions maintained in its abstract neutrality; it is more than experience, which as such is always fragmentary. It is, namely, the transubstantiation of experience; it is an unshakeable certainty in oneself won from all experience, whether this has oriented itself only in all worldly relationships (a purely human standpoint, Stoicism, for example)...or whether in its heavenward direction (the religious) it has found therein the center as much for its heavenly as its earthly existence...\(^{1828}\)

The term “life-view” appears again in *Either/Or*, Part II, signifying a view of the meaning of human life and the way the individual regards life, both his own and that around him.\(^{1829}\)

It seems that the term “life-view” has thus replaced the term “totality-view” that Kierkegaard associated with Hegelian science in his dissertation. The motivation and point of the terminological change might be that while Hegelian science may provide a totality-view, Kierkegaard thinks that it cannot provide a life-view. George Pattison has traced Kierkegaard’s notion of “life-view” back to his teacher Poul Martin Møller. The latter writes that a person, who participates in the historical and communal life of Christianity, may construct a “life-view” or “world-view” by combining his ideal experience and his empirical experience. Møller points out that, if the Hegelian “pure science” cannot conceive such a life-view, this just shows that it is “a one-sided form of knowledge.”\(^{1830}\) Kierkegaard seems to follow here in Møller’s footsteps. He notes in his *Journals and Papers* in July 1840, that the

\(^{1828}\) *EPW*, 76 / *SV* I XIII, 68.


\(^{1830}\) Pattison 1992, 28–29 and 41.
Hegelian system becomes confused whenever it tries to comprehend the historical actuality, which is a unity of the metaphysical and the accidental. While the Hegelians consider the phenomenon from the bird’s-eye perspective of metaphysics, they are unable to perceive “the metaphysical in the phenomenon from the perspective of the phenomenon.” Hence the Hegelian system is unable to comprehend the unity of the metaphysical and the accidental—the unity that, divinely regarded, is providence (Forsynet) and, humanly regarded, the historical.\textsuperscript{1831} As a “transubstantiation of experience” and a conviction “won from all experience,” a life-view could then, perhaps, be defined as \textit{a subjective totality-view constructed from the perspective of the phenomenon}. As such, a life-view cannot be constructed through necessary steps dictated by a scientific method. Instead, it results from an attempt to see and create meaning in life with the help of imagination, passion, will, and faith.

While the Hegelian philosophy cannot provide a life-view, Kierkegaard comes to think that the human being always has some kind of a life-view. At least, in \textit{Either/Or}, Judge William claims that even a person that lives aesthetically has “a life-view, a conception of life’s meaning and purpose.” According to the judge, the core of the aesthetic life-view is the notion that one must enjoy life.\textsuperscript{1832} In fact, the life-view of the young aesthete A that meets us in \textit{Either/Or}, Part I, does not seem to be that positive. In his “Diapsalmata” he writes about “life’s huge conflagration” and laments the total meaninglessness of life that ends in death.\textsuperscript{1833} But according to Judge William this is only because A has already reached the limit of the aesthetic. Although he still has an aesthetic life-view, he has already seen through the aesthetic way of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{1831} \textit{JP} 2, 1587 / \textit{Pap.} III A 1.
\item \textsuperscript{1832} \textit{EO2}, 179 / \textit{SVI} II, 163.
\item \textsuperscript{1833} \textit{EO1}, 25 and 29 / \textit{SVI} II, 9 and 13–14.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
life and realized the nothingness of aesthetic enjoyment. In consequence despair itself has become his life-view.\textsuperscript{1834}

In contrast to the aesthetic life-view that bases life on transient enjoyment and ends up gazing in despair at “life’s huge conflagration,” the ethical life-view, which Judge William champions, builds life on that which has being as its essential quality.\textsuperscript{1835} The judge refers to “the eternal power that omnipresently pervades all existence [Tilværelse],”\textsuperscript{1836} to God “who rules the world,”\textsuperscript{1837} and to “a rational order of things in which every human being, if he so wills, fills his place.”\textsuperscript{1838} Within this order of things, work becomes a calling and constancy becomes an essential part of love and friendship.\textsuperscript{1839} The focus on the inwardness of the ethical struggle and the belief in the eventual victory of the ethical put all doubts about the meaning of life to rest. In consequence, the life of every individual acquires beauty, truth, meaning, and security.\textsuperscript{1840}

While the ethical life-view focuses on struggle and victory, suffering becomes “the totality-category” in the religious life-view, explains Climacus in Postscript. The religious life-view seeks the uplifting not in victorious striving, but in the suffering that leads to God, and while the ethical life-view regards everyone as potentially victorious, the religious life-view presupposes that all men are and should be sufferers that are in need of God.\textsuperscript{1841} In the humorous life-view meaningless suffering remains the last word and there is no meaning in history.

\textsuperscript{1834} EO2, 193–196 / SV\textsuperscript{I} II, 175–177.
\textsuperscript{1835} EO2, 225 / SV\textsuperscript{I} II, 201.
\textsuperscript{1836} EO2, 167 / SV\textsuperscript{I} II, 152.
\textsuperscript{1837} EO2, 236 / SV\textsuperscript{I} II, 212.
\textsuperscript{1838} EO2, 292 / SV\textsuperscript{I} II, 262.
\textsuperscript{1839} EO2, 291–293, 301–302, 304, and 319 / SV\textsuperscript{I} II, 261–263, 270, 272–273, and 286.
\textsuperscript{1840} EO2, 271 and 275–276 / SV\textsuperscript{I} II, 243 and 247.
\textsuperscript{1841} See CUP, 288 and 431–437 / SV\textsuperscript{II} VII, 338 and 374–380.
The Christian life-view, however, clarifies suffering with reference to history itself with the help of the Bible and dogmatic concepts such as hereditary sin, faith, and Governance. At the same time it restores the meaning of the on-going history as it envisions life as an upbringing, which is meant to end well in the future life.

Studying *Philosophical Fragments* and *Practice in Christianity*, we have seen how Kierkegaard approaches the Bible not through a scientific world-view as an object for critical research, but as an eternally valid script of life. As David J. Gouwens writes in his *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (1996), typical to Kierkegaard is “imaginative, emphatic engagement with the Scriptural.”

Gouwens explains: “Kierkegaard *immersed* himself in the biblical world, seeing in Scripture, not an object of scholarly investigation, but the source for the primary categories of the faith...[R]ather than adapting the biblical world to modernity, Kierkegaard allowed himself to be shaped by the biblical world.”

But not only did Kierkegaard let himself be brought up by the Bible, he also evaluated his times in its light. Kierkegaard’s “imaginative reflection on the gospels’ portrayals of Jesus’ life” forms a basis for his radical critique of modern Christendom, suggests Gouwens.

In interpreting and using the Bible, Kierkegaard dramatizes its stories and imaginatively plays with them, so that he obtains a timeless ethical-religious message out of them. On the other hand, Kierkegaard interprets the Bible in the light of the universally human ethical-religious striving. The presupposition of his Bible reading is that the Bible must give the ultimate explanation and solution to the problems every person encounters in this striving. But at the same time the personal ethical-religious striving in the given historical actuality becomes the key for understanding the meaning of the Bible. In connection with Kierkegaard’s Bible

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1843 Gouwens 1996, 22.
1844 Gouwens 1996, 212.
reading one may thus speak of *an ethical-religious hermeneutics*. The universally human ethical striving is the precondition for apprehending the truth of the Bible, and following in practice the directions and particular paradigms that the Bible presents to us is the precondition for truly participating in that truth.

To the Christian dogmas Kierkegaard relates as unscientifically as to the Bible, even if the form of presentation in *The Concept of Anxiety* and in *The Sickness unto Death* does imitate the scientific form. Kierkegaard approaches sin and faith from the point of view of personal experience and with the help of dramatic imagination and empathy. Except for the beginning of *The Concept of Anxiety*, there are no attempts for a comprehensive discussion on the positions of major theologians and Churches. On the other hand, both *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death* attempt to build a life-view on the dogma of hereditary sin in that they interpret the whole human life in the light of it and find its symptoms everywhere. The first mentioned work dares to find signs of sinfulness even in non-human nature.

The solution to the problem of sin is offered by faith in Christ, which is investigated and set into its historical context with the help of poetic imagination in *Philosophical Fragments* and in *Practice in Christianity*. True to the demand of forming a consistent life-view, Kierkegaard also points out the external suffering that the following of Christ in this world is bound to involve. Already in *Philosophical Fragments* it is suggested that the unselfish and self-sacrificing life of the follower of Christ is bound to be re-

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1845 See the Introduction and Chapter I of *The Concept of Anxiety*.
1846 *CA*, 57–58 / *SV1* IV, 328. *The Concept of Anxiety* thus contains some germs of a dogmatic theory of natural science. Other examples are the view that the amount of anxiety and sensuousness increases with every conception and every birth (*CA*, 72 / *SV1* IV, 341), and the view that the demonic manifests somatically, for example, in bestial forms of madness (*CA*, 137 / *SV1* IV, 403–404). I must admit that I do not know what to think of such scientific theories.
warded with insurmountable adversities.\footnote{PF, 45 and 56–57 / SV1 IV, 213 and 222–223.} According to Practice in Christianity, the modern imitator of Christ must actually suffer the same persecution and forsakenness as the prototype suffered and, in addition, suffer from the constant fear of being in the wrong in his conflict with other “Christians” and “Christian” pastors.\footnote{PC, 196–198 / SV1 XII, 181–183.} The Point of View then depicts a life that in its modest way exemplifies this suffering of the Christian in Christendom. In other words, suffering does not disappear from religious life with Christianity; on the contrary, it increases and becomes external as well as internal. In contrast to the humorous life-view, however, the Christian perceives a positive aspect in suffering: it is through suffering that Governance brings us up and prepares us for the highest good.\footnote{This positive aspect that suffering has for the Christian is brought out by Claudia Welz in her yet unpublished dissertation God’s (Non)Phenomenality and the Problem of Theodicy.}

Now we have outlined the contours of the different life-views that correspond with different stages of existence. But as a certain life-view always corresponds with a certain stage of existence, the theory of stages as a totality may be regarded as one more life-view, as a metalevel life-view. It contains qualitatively different lives and life-views cast in reflection, so that the reader becomes conscious of the total journey from the immediate aesthetic existence to the Christian existence. In the theory of stages subjectivity is shown to have the key role in the forming of a life-view. The emphasis on subjectivity is justified both with reference to a religious belief and with reference to philosophical insights concerning the position of the subject in the world. According to a religious belief, the omnipotent God gives every human being freedom.\footnote{Cf. CUP, 246 / SV1 VII, 207 and JP 2, 1251 / Pap. VII 1 181.} The philosophical view combined with this belief is that every human being is
epistemologically and hermeneutically the center of his own world, although he exists in a world that is ontologically independent from his consciousness and will. In that respect Kantian philosophers, who take subjectivity as a starting point in their investigations, and Romantic ironists, who take it into consideration in practice, are right. However, they are wrong, inasmuch as they give up the religious truth that the subject is created by another and that the life of the subject takes place in the world that is created by another, i.e. by God. If this is the correct interpretation of the religious life-view behind Climacus’ emphasis on subjectivity, then it is clear that for him “to become subjective” does not equal “to forget one’s situatedness in the creation” but, rather, “to fulfill the will of the Creator in this world.”

In the above exegesis evidence has been presented to support this interpretation. By reading Postscript side by side with other pseudonymous texts, an attempt has been made to show that the historical and social situatedness of the subject is implied in the Kierkegaardian modes of existence. As the theory of stages suggests, the situation of the subject does, indeed, depend on the subject. The subject interprets his situation and situates himself in it in accordance with his imagination, passion, will, and faith. What is in the subject—the desire for aesthetic enjoyment, the ethical striving, Christian faith—inform his life-view. But, on the other hand, historical and social actuality is there and affects the subject. Without it, there would be nothing from which to take distance through irony and nothing in which to realize the universal in the ethical existence after the stage of irony. Without it, the passions and ideas pertaining to faith in Christ could likewise never arise in the human spirit, for it is the historical actuality that gives rise to the Christian consciousness of the eternal. Finally, without the social and historical actuality, it would be impossible to imagine that Governance is bringing the Christian up, for this Governance is doing through the historical and social actuality.
9.1.4 Historical and Social Actuality

On the basis of our exegesis of Kierkegaard’s works, it is possible to outline his view on historical and social actuality. Historical actuality consists of existing individuals and their acts and achievements in the finite and temporal world. Society and the forms of association in it are products and means of co-operation of individuals. As such they are always historically determined and they may never become established so that they would permanently represent what is eternal and infinite. For example, it is an illusion that Christendom could be established once and for all. In this respect the social actuality is a function of the historical, in which the eternal and infinite constantly touch the temporal and finite. But on the other hand, the historical is itself constituted by God, who governs its events as a poet-director governs the events of the drama, and by human beings, who as actors of this drama constantly produce it through their interaction. Thus, from another point of view the historical actuality is a function of the social. And although all the action in it is also always determined by the past, at the center of history stands the present moment (Øieblkommen), a unity of state and transition that is constituted by an ecstatic relation of the human subjects to God who stands outside them. This ecstatic relation that takes place in time, but is a relation to God who is immune to time, is the basis of temporality and the arkhe of history, which is always present. At the same time it is the basis of good human relationships.

An existing subject is situated in the historical actuality and exists in it together with other subjects. What has been carried out and brought forth in the historical actuality, by God and by other subjects, conditions his existence by constituting for him both possibilities and necessities. As Kierkegaard puts it in The Concept of Irony, the historical actuality “stands in a twofold relation to the subject, partly as a gift that refuses to be rejected, partly as a task
that wants to be fulfilled." On the basis of our exegesis above, let us now consider how in the alternative project of living poetically the historical actuality becomes constituted as a gift and a task in the moments of time.

In *Either/Or*, Part II, history is seen as a dialectical movement in which individuals overcome ethically the adversities they meet in the given actuality and through this overcoming develop towards perfection. Judge William bases his belief in the victory of the ethical on the convictions that all existence is sustained by God and that through the ethical choice of oneself and repentance the individuals are able to ground their personal and social existence in God. As the judge sees it, the absolute ethical choice means, in fact, receiving. At the moment of choice the ethical individual receives his life again from the hand of God and relates through repentance to his past, including the past of his forefathers. In this way he attains freedom not just as an abstract spirit, but as a concrete spirit that has a history in which he stands "in relation to other individuals of the race and to the whole race."  

After the moment of choice temporality comes to mean for the individual a gift of grace, an opportunity given for the glorification of his finite spirit. The appropriate reception of this gift constitutes the task of his ethical life. The task is to gain a history by freely appropriating all that has fallen to his lot, to realize the universal, and to become open as a fully developed ethical individual in our common world. By fulfilling this task the individual comes to assist God, but God will also assist the individual at every moment of his life. He, who rules the world, guarantees that the ethical individual will find his purpose and meaning in the social

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1851 *CI*, 276 / *SV* I XIII, 348.
1852 *EO*, 177 / *SV* II, 160: "[T]he I chooses itself or, more correctly, receives itself."
1853 *EO*, 216 / *SV* II, 193.
world. Therefore, by fulfilling his calling, each of us is able to partake and do his lot in the totality of ethical individuals. Yet, despite the optimism of the judge, the basic fact behind repentance and behind the ethical striving that he describes is the fallenness of the human race. The different forms of aesthetic life, which Judge William catalogues in his letter to his young friend and which he apparently considers as very widespread in modern society, exemplify this fallenness. These forms of life dominated by reflection and by quest for aesthetic enjoyment form a reality that the ethical individual must face and dialectically overcome, if he wants to appropriate his history and become unified with the life of the race. Part of the task is to understand the motivation behind these forms of life. Equipped with love, Judge William tries to understand the aesthetic ways of life. Instead of making a hasty judgment, he probes with empathy through the surface of the aesthetic forms of life to understand their ground in the subject and he finds despair, anxiety, and melancholy (Tungsind, depression) underneath. In one passage Judge William connects these psychological phenomena with hereditary sin and admits that ultimately no individual is able fully to reveal himself ethically and to realize the universal.

But beyond this admission the judge is not willing to move towards the religious life-view. Instead, he sticks to the universal that opens up through the ethical. The reluctance of the judge to lose himself in the religious is understandable in the light of Postscript where Climacus shows how the road into the religious leads deeper and deeper into hidden inwardness: while in his hidden inwardness the individual keeps hold of the eternal through religious pathos, his ethical life in the historical and social world be-

\[1855\] EO2, 236 and 292 / SVI II, 212 and 262.
\[1858\] EO2, 190 / SVI II, 171 together with EO2, 332 / SVI II, 298.
comes a kind of shadow existence. The historical actuality ceases to appear as a gift, and the task for the spirit becomes constantly to get out of it. Humor makes up the climax of this negative development. In it the moment of time is swallowed by the recollection of the eternal and historical and social actuality loses its significance.

Focusing on the qualitative leaps of fall and faith, The Concept of Anxiety and Philosophical Fragments bring the individual back to the moment of time. What takes place between the subjects in the historical actuality has now decisive significance for their eternal salvation. The Concept of Anxiety constructs temporality and history out of the moments in which the eternal spirit touches time. In the historically given situations individuals make decisions that constitute their histories. At the same time their decisions have an effect on the historical world shared by all human individuals. The fall into sin, in which the individual gives up his trust in God, brings sinfulness into the world. This fall repeats itself again and again in the history of the human race, with the result that anxiety and the possibility of falling into sin increase from generation to generation. The historical actuality stands there now as a task that no human being can possibly fulfill by virtue of his ethical will. Only faith, which “extricates itself from anxiety’s moment of death,” is able to overcome the hereditary and self-incurred negativity that plagues humankind. According to Vigilius, in faith the human synthesis is still “at every moment possible.”

From Philosophical Fragments we learn what is involved in the gift of faith. Here Climacus distinguishes between ordinary belief and Christian faith. Ordinary belief is the organ for apprehending the free coming into existence that makes up the historical actuality. Belief apprehends the spirit in which ideas and plans are real-

1859 CA, 117 / SVI IV, 385.
ized in the moments of time. Thus, fundamentally, the apprehen-
sion of historical actuality is not a matter of knowledge, but of belief: while the historical data is given, the interpretation of the “how” of the spirits behind its coming into existence remains a matter of free interpretation. Within the historical actuality the coming into time of God in the form of a humble servant is a special case. It makes up a self-contradictory fact that can be apprehended only through paradoxical Christian faith that is itself aroused through the same event. As such, the life of Christ and the effusion of faith make up a subversive moment, a turning point that restructures both the historical actuality and the way it is apprehended. With regard to it, there is no essential difference between the human beings living now and the human beings that lived twenty centuries ago. Christian faith depends on a supernatural gift given to human individuals in the historical actuality and this gift God may still give to any human individual in the historical actuality.

Thus, contemporaneity with Christ depends, first, on the event that took place hundreds of years ago for the whole human race (the life of Christ) but, second, on the event that may take place right now for any individual (the donation of the passion of faith). While the donation of the gift of faith does not depend on the will and activity of the individuals, its appropriate reception and use do seem to depend on them. That is the task posited by the gift, in the fulfilling of which the individual again comes to need assistance from God. However, as sinful human beings “Christians” tend to bypass this task and want to construct their own history and their own world with the help of their reason and understanding. This characterizes very much the age of reflection, that is, the modern, post-Enlightenment age, in which humanity as a collec-

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1860 Kierkegaard writes in his preface to *Practice in Christianity* that the requirement of Christian life should be heard “so that I might learn not only to resort to grace but to resort to it in relation to the use of grace (*PC, 7 / SV* XII, xv).”
tive has assumed the governing of the world and human reason and reflection have assumed the place of God.

Ideally society is constituted by passionate relationships (Forholdene) that relate the individuals first to the eternal and then through the eternal to each other. However, in the age of reflection the eternal becomes abstract and passionate personal relationships become cut off by critical reflection. The eternal and infinite dimension becomes closed up for concrete human beings and they assume the prevailing custom and habit as their highest ethical criterion. The result is the spiritless crudeness typical of “bourgeois-philistinism,” of “paganism within Christendom,” of “finite common sense,” and of “worldly wisdom” that Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms in their texts try to break up both with the help of irony and with outpourings of passion.

What makes it bizarre is that this crudeness, this petty-minded leveling, which is the consequent negation of living poetically and which in the ethical-religious respect falls far behind ancient paganism, takes the rule in Christendom under the name of Christianity. Every Christian institution should be based on personal God-relationships and the institutions should form the setting for the personal following of Christ in this world. But established Christendom makes individuals forget this. The illusion of Christendom is that certain institutions and institutionalized practices by themselves make citizens of a country into Christians. Under this illusion human life degenerates to the level that is even far below the ethical-religious project of Judge William, from which there still is a long way to go before one comes to live poetically in the Christian way.

The gap between the Christian ideal and the ideal of Judge William is already noticed in passing in Philosophical Fragments, where Climacus juxtaposes realizing the universal and following

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This gap is cracked wide open in *Practice in Christianity*, where Anti-Climacus brings the task of following of Christ into focus and dramatically sets it against the contemporary social actuality. Anti-Climacus shows that to fulfill the task posited by Christianity is not to become happy as a respected man, who lives in perfect harmony with the established social order, but to become abased and persecuted, because one practices Christian self-denial. This is the task posited by the gift of faith for those who live as Christians in the historical world.

In *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard describes how he actually made a modest attempt to fulfill this task in his own society by refusing to play according to unwritten rules, respected by the elite and the common men alike, which sustain the “Christian,” in fact neo-pagan, society. Instead of going after worldly power and prosperity, instead of affirming his difference and social standing, he tried to realize equality through self-denial and neighbor love. Although this meant becoming “the single individual” in defiance of all parties, it also meant realizing the universally human. Kierkegaard’s ideal of “the single individual” means, thus, the opposite of isolation from the shared historical actuality. It means becoming open and realizing through Christian practice the ideals of freedom, equality, and true humanity in the given historical actuality. Given this Christian repetition of these ethical ideals, it is clear that the difference between the ethical-religious and Christian life-view is not in the basic adherence to them. Instead, the difference is in understanding the task that the historically given actuality sets for individuals. Unlike Judge William, the Christian recognizes that, since sinfulness makes selfishness and self-satisfaction into the ruling principles in society, to realize the universally human must inevitably involve a transgression against the prevailing custom and habit.

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1862 See *PF*, 56–57 / *SV1* IV, 222–223 referred to in subdivision 5.3 above.
The transgression pertaining to Christianity is especially clear in the sphere of politics, where the Christian way of realizing freedom, equality, and true humanity differs radically from “realistic” political attempts to realize these ideals.

9.1.5 (Anti)politics

Kierkegaard sees his age as an age oriented towards freedom, equality, and humanity. But while these ideals are understood in his age as political ideals, he believes that fundamentally they are Christian ideals. As a response to the contemporary demands for political reforms, Kierkegaard thus champions Christian existence and Christian practice. His idea seems to be that inasmuch as these ideals have their basis in ethical and religious inwardness, they should also be realized through ethical and religious inwardness. Through external political reformation they will never find their proper realization, for these do not mean that individuals would have overcome their unfreedom, inequality, and inhumanity. Actually the political struggle for power just perpetuates unfreedom, inequality, and inhumanity in the world. Rather than messing around in the external individuals should therefore first and foremost actualize freedom, equality, and humanity in their own existence as single individuals responsible for God. An ethical choice of oneself, repentance, and redemption are the way to freedom and Christian neighborly love is the way to realize universal equality and true humanity. Through these ways the ideals in question could possibly become true in communities, whereas political upheavals lead only to dissolution, bitterness, and confusion.

1863 Kierkegaard writes in his Journals and Papers: “Christ clearly means this: if you want to be a Christian then, first and foremost and above all, snap your fingers at politics; whose image you see in the coin, whether it is Peter or Paul, a foreigner or compatriot, never mind, don’t waste any more time on such quarrels…” (JP 4, 4151 / Pap. IX A 353. Translation slightly altered.)
sion. Against utopian political projects, Kierkegaard thus champions the continuous presence of the single individual before God and the presence of Christ within single individuals. His cure for unfreedom, inequality, and inhumanity is an ethical-religious reform from within.\footnote{Kresten Nordentoft has suggested that in his last years Kierkegaard came, after all, to favor revolutionary Christian reforms in the external. According to Nordentoft, Kierkegaard came to realize that in fact Christ himself had been in constant polemic with the established order. (See Nordentoft 1977, 107–109.) Kierkegaard came to realize that originally Christianity had meant a turning towards those suffering, poor, sick, leprous, mentally ill, and such alike, sinners and criminals, but that in history Christianity had become the property of “better” people and those who rule. Thereby the Christian message had, implicitly, been reversed so that Christian righteousness now went hand in hand with prosperity, worldly success, and reputation. According to the late Kierkegaard that is a kind of blasphemy. The rich, well-doing, and well-respected men have no right to preach about Christian resignation to poverty and servitude in the manner of the apostle Paul. Paul lived in poverty and self-denial, but in the mouth of the pampered upper class priests Christianity becomes an ideology cruel to the poor. (Nordentoft 1973, 201–202.) In order, then, to destroy this ideology Kierkegaard came to favor external action, assumed the role of the fire-chief, and made his open attack in 1854–1855 in order to “burn down” the Church. Nordentoft’s interpretation of the train of thought behind Kierkegaard’s attack seems plausible. However, it is worth noticing that even during the attack Kierkegaard kept acting as an anti-politician, in other words, he kept acting in the way that was the opposite of what the political wisdom would dictate: first, he acted as a single individual and rejected the support of comrades in arms, second, he did his best to appear as a lunatic eccentric who attacks the most respected gentlemen in the society. Furthermore, it seems clear that for the late Kierkegaard Christianity was still the basis of freedom, equality, and true humanity and that his maneuvers in the external still aimed above all at internal transformation. Rather than an attempt to gain worldly power, it was a symbolic action that aimed to liberate Christians from the power of the world.}

Polemical to political movements of his times, Kierkegaard also criticizes the idea that democracy would lead to freedom, self-government, and equality of rational and ethical human beings.
He considers public political discussion and majority rule as tyrannical, inhuman, and as fatal for all consequent striving towards high ideals. He claims that democratic politicians cannot rule according to ethical principles as they have to consider first and foremost how to gain and keep power. He criticizes the party spirit and political game typical to democratic elections and decision making. These criticisms might suggest that Kierkegaard was a typical conservative of his times. However, Kierkegaard, too, was for freedom, equality, and humanity. As he admits in a letter to J. L. A. Kolderup-Rosenvinge, in a sense, he, too, “belongs to the movement party.” His conviction is that in order to move towards the ideals of freedom, equality, and humanity, the way is not to fight for worldly power—an act that manifests and produces unfreedom, inequality, and inhumanity. True freedom (freedom from sin), true equality and humanity (neighbor love), and sensible government (the rule of Governance) would be possible only if individuals actually grounded their existence in God here and now.

Since the world is as it is, however, it rewards authentic ethical and Christian life with persecution and suffering. Therefore, from the finite point of view, the Christian anti-politics of “the single individual” appears as crazy politics. To renounce worldly power and glory and to give up the worldly good appears a sure way to become a loser. Moreover, as Kierkegaard points out, it is a transgression against the prevailing custom and habit to the extent that it may even appear as a betrayal of humanity and as hatred of the human race. But the Christian, who aims at a victory that is

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1865 JP 4, 4144 / Pap. VIII 1 A 667.
1866 JP 4, 4215 / Pap. X 4 A 249.
1867 Pap. X 2 A 487.
1868 See LD, 260 / B&d, 206, the letter no. 186 written on August 20, 1848.
eternal and infinite, does not betray his fellow humans. On the contrary, he does what he can to rescue them. He hopes that, in the drama of life, his martyrdom, his imitation of Christ, may bring his fellow humans back to their senses. For him this is not crazy politics, but the only way to stop “the vortex” that the struggle for political power creates and that seems to take so many human lives into perdition.

9.1.6 Life as a Drama

Kierkegaard did not consider himself a martyr or a witness to the truth, but he believed that in the modern age martyrdom could still be possible. The framework that makes the suffering action of a martyr still meaningful seems to be life understood as an ethical-religious drama. Because the acts of the persecutors and the persecuted wind up together in the same drama, a communication takes place between them indirectly through the action of the drama. When those for the sake of whom the martyr suffers realize what they have done to him and what he was trying to communicate to them, they may come to their senses. In the light of their own involvement in the drama, they may realize how totally their sinful lives are invested in finitude and temporality. In the light of the example set by the victorious martyr, they may realize that the goal of the drama of life is not to be victorious in finitude and

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1870 See, for example, *PV*, 123–124 / *SV* XIII, 609–610.
1871 In the research literature the significance of the drama analogy for Kierkegaard has been discussed by George Pattison in his *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious* (see Pattison 1992, 95–124 and 155 and 188). My interpretation is in many respects in debt to the insights of Pattison. However, I do not think, as Pattison does, that Kierkegaard considered it necessary to step out of the world of drama in order to reach real life. Rather he considered the world as the site for a religious drama (i.e. for a drama written and directed by God, in contrast to a drama written and directed by humanity).
temporality, but in infinitude and eternity. The possibility of being a Christian martyr, a Christian blood-witness, thus goes hand in hand with the conception of life as an ethical-religious drama.

More generally, understanding life in terms of drama appears to be the organizing principle of all Kierkegaardian projects of living poetically. In the exegesis above we have seen how one pseudonym of Kierkegaard after another understands life in terms of drama. They imagine that human beings are characters in a drama written and directed by God, and they depict the decisive situations, events, and actions as if they were part of such a drama.\(^{1872}\)

What is essential in such a drama is not the outer shell of external settings and events, but the spiritual that expresses itself and develops through the history of the drama. In other words, the essential is the inwardness of spirits and the relationships between them: the relationships between the actors and the director, and the relationships between the actors. Although the actors are directed by the same director, the relationship to the director is the personal matter of each actor and cannot be made public. At the same time this relationship is the decisive one. In consequence, God always remains between the actors as “the middle term” that they should take into consideration as they act and speak. Moreover, the actors are not able to express their spiritual inwardness exhaustively in finitude and temporality. There are no direct relations between them as ethical-religious subjects, since finitude and temporality, which in addition is distorted by sinfulness, comes between. In consequence, only indirect communication is possible

\(^{1872}\) See, for example, *EO2*, 137 / *SV1* II, 124–125 and *CUP*, 157–158 / *SV1* VII, 130, and consider how Kierkegaard presents the fall in *The Concept of Anxiety*, the encounter with the God in *Philosophical Fragments*, becoming offended in *The Sickness unto Death*, and turning down Christ’s invitation and following Christ in *Practice in Christianity*. Consider also Kierkegaard’s idea of himself as acting as a spy in Christendom in *The Point of View* and his sense of drama, for example in the affair with *Corsaren*. 
between them, and the “how” of personal actuality of each subject remains an open question for others to decide on. No one can know what the actuality of another spirit is actually like. On the basis of appearance it may only be believed that one human possibility or another has been actualized in it.

On the other hand, the external appearance is not inessential for Kierkegaard, since the spiritual expresses and wants to express itself through the external.\footnote{See, for example, WL, 5–16 / SV1 IX, 9–20} In a sense, the temporal and finite life—the words and deeds of human beings in the external reality, the events of historical actuality—is just a play of shadows. But still, it is in the temporal and finite life that the inwardness manifests itself and communicates itself to the inwardness of others. Accordingly, the concrete settings in which the spirits meet each other are the topic of infinite interest and concern for Kierkegaard. He considers carefully, for example, the external settings of his publications. The broken engagement, the affair with Corsaren, the year 1848, the “coteries,” and the relations to Heiberg, Martenssen, and Mynster are all taken into consideration in his work as an author.\footnote{For evidence on this, see, for example Joakim Garff’s biography SAK (2000).} He also draws conclusions on the basis of external conduct on the inwardness of his fellow humans. In The Point of View he tells us how he saw that “Christians” have their lives in completely different categories than Christian ones, and how this insight informed his work as an author.\footnote{PV, 41 / SV1 XIII, 529–530.} Moreover, he believes that the will of God manifests itself in the events and facts of the external actuality. In The Point of View he explains how Governance directed him through historical and social circumstances to fulfill his work as an author.\footnote{See PV, 71–90 / SV1 XIII, 556–575.} In other words, Kierkegaard surmised what the inner was like that most probably hid behind the behavior of his contemporaries, and what was God’s
will that made itself present in the events of life within and without him. Although he could not draw any conclusive conclusions, probability and subjective conviction were enough for him to orient him in his personal action.

Understanding life from the analogy of drama and us situated in it makes Kierkegaard resemble in certain respect postmodern thinkers. For example, he takes into consideration the plurality of different viewpoints of life and keeps truth suspended in uncertainty. However, as a Christian thinker Kierkegaard is rather pre- than postmodern. Although he takes into consideration our situatedness in the drama of historical life, he believes that there is an ahistorical reality, to which we are related and on which we should ground our existence absolutely. He acknowledges that as long as human beings exist in this changeable world, there are different perspectives into this ahistorical reality. However, he is convinced that fundamentally there is only one Truth and one Way and Life, namely the one pointed out in the Bible. In the drama of life, the Bible appears to Kierkegaard as the script on the basis of which one may understand the drama of life and orient oneself in it. The characters and stories in the Bible serve as eternally valid paradigms and Kierkegaard expects no total paradigm shifts to take place. Kierkegaard’s adherence to the Bible and to the eternal truth of Christianity also means that historicism (i.e. the view that the historical conditions always affect human understanding of the truth), has only limited validity in his thought. He is convinced that there exists a script for human life and that, in essence, this script remains fixed: one generation after another may rely on the Biblical view of life. In *The Concept of Anxiety* he suggests that the fall repeats itself as it is depicted in the Bible in every human life. In *Philosophical Fragments* he suggests that the task of accepting faith will always be as difficult for human beings as it was for the characters of the Bible. In *Practice in Christianity* he suggests that the persecution and martyrdom depicted in the Bible will
always belong to those following Christ. As a script, the Bible thus presents for Kierkegaard an eternally valid view on what is essential in the historical actuality. Thus, the “historical point of departure for an eternal consciousness” is, paradoxically, itself ahistorical: the “Bibliodrama” repeats itself.

On the other hand, Kierkegaard interprets the Bible and accommodates it into the present situations in a flexible, imaginative way. On the basis of the passion play recounted in the Gospel, his basic conception of God is fixed: God loves human beings, wants equality and unity with them, and wants to rescue them from the thralldom of sin. This conception of the nature and will of God gives the key to understanding the ethical-religious significance of historical events. If God is like Christ in his love for us, then whatever happens to us in the world must have this meaning: God is governing the world to the best of us, taking care of us, and bringing us up. However, precisely in order to keep hold of this fixed interpretation, in order to believe that whatever happens to us in the present age is an act of Governance, flexibility of passion and imagination is needed. For example, a passionate sense of guilt is needed in dismissing in advance the problem of theodicy: in denying with the inwardness of faith that some event of life could ever show that God is not love.1877 Imagination is needed in imagining that, if God turns his back on the human race, this, too, is an expression of his upbringing righteousness.1878 Passion and imagination are needed in believing that at the end of time Christ will come again and that the time between his ascension and his second coming is just an “examination period,” whether it lasts eighteen hundred or eighteen thousand years.1879

In Kierkegaard’s Christian project of living poetically a subjective faith and ethical striving govern, but also need as their pre-
condition an interpretation of the history as a drama directed by God. For Kierkegaard the center of human existence is faith in the loving God and the ethical striving that corresponds to this faith. But together with these two goes the interpretation that events in historical actuality express God’s will and governance. This poetic interpretation of God’s will in the historical actuality is sustained by the ethical-religious God-relationship. However, without the historical actuality and the interpretation of it as a drama directed by God, the ethical-religious inwardness of the subject would make little sense and would not have the form that it has.

9.2 A Glance at Kierkegaard Research

In the research at hand the ideal of living poetically has been distilled out of Kierkegaard’s texts and then used in analyzing his thought. The ideal as a totality provides a framework for better understanding Kierkegaard’s view on the human synthesis and his view on the functions of imagination, passion, will, and faith in human life. However, as stated in the Introduction above, the specific aim of this research has been

1) to situate the Kierkegaardian subject in its historical context,
2) to shed light on Kierkegaard’s social and political thought,
3) to characterize Kierkegaard as a religious thinker, and

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1880 Hence, it is understandable that in Two Ages, for example, Kierkegaard denies that his prophecy of the future of the human race could be anything else except “a means of recreation...an interesting game such as bowling or tilting the barrel (TA, 110 / SVI VIII, 102).”

1881 Hence, it makes sense that Kierkegaard all the same maintains that the interpretation of the present age in Two Ages forms the background for his ethical-religious concept of “the single individual” (see PV, 119 esp. n.2 / SVI XIII, 605, esp. n.2).
4) to analyze the religious orientation in life in its opposition to the scientific and commonsense orientations.

We shall now take a look on how this effort is related to the past and contemporary efforts in Kierkegaard research to treat these topics.

9.2.1 History as a Context of the Ethical-Religious Subject

What Kierkegaard criticized Romantic ironists for has been often considered the defect of his own thinking: the lack of understanding and consideration of the historical and social actuality. In his Søren Kierkegaards Historiefilosofi (Søren Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of History, 1952) Søren Holm states that philosophy of history is a most central part of Kierkegaard’s philosophy and his conception of Christianity. However, Holm claims that having received no proper schooling in the subject of history, Kierkegaard did not understand much about it. According to Holm, he had neither a solid methodical nor a good “cultural-sociological” conception of history.1882

In his work Holm recapitulates what Kierkegaard writes on history in Philosophical Fragments, in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, and in Practice in Christianity; occasionally he also consults The Concept of Anxiety and Journals and Papers. His focus is on the absolute paradox, i.e. on God’s historical existence on earth. Is it for Kierkegaard a historical fact or a fiction? Is it an external fact that takes place on the same line as all the other historical events? Or is it only a paradoxical conceptual construction, to which one is supposed to hold with passion as if such an event actually had taken place in history?1883 Holm argues that the latter is the case for Kierkegaard: the historical fact of Christ, “the absolute fact,” is

1882 Holm 1952, 5–6.
1883 Holm 1952, 70 and 110.
for Kierkegaard a fiction or a fictional fact that exists in its own sphere. Faith as if pulls the life of Christ out of its historical context and makes it into an eternal event with the result that it can no longer make up a part in the continuity of history, but becomes either a point (as “the paradox” in Philosophical Fragments) or a line (as “the sacred history” in Practice in Christianity) outside the line of real history. Holm defends his view by arguing that an absolute historical event, such as Anti-Climacus suggests the life of Christ to be, is a contradictio in adjecto and the science of history denies the reality of such events. The empirical and factual events that make up the line of real history are always relative, always related to each other, and there are no “absolute” facts. Holm seems to share here the view of modern philosophers and historians that he describes in his book, according to which the events of history are related to each other through necessary chains of causes and effects.

Holm’s criticism of Kierkegaard is a bit strange, since he notices himself that in Philosophical Fragments Kierkegaard argues explicitly against conceiving history as a necessary chain of causes and effects. As Holm points out, according to Fragments, the coming into existence that makes up history always takes place by way of a relatively freely acting cause that in turn points to an absolutely freely acting cause. In other words, history consists of acts of relatively free human individuals and, fundamentally, of acts of the absolutely free God. If this is the case, then the absoluteness of the fact of “the god in time” is a bit easier to conceive, even if the fact itself remains paradoxical. It is perhaps not completely impossible that “the absolutely freely acting cause,” i.e.

\[1884\] Holm 1952, 94 and 112–116.
\[1885\] Holm 1952, 115.
\[1886\] Holm 1952, 33–34.
\[1887\] Holm 1952, 34–45.
\[1888\] Holm 1952, 39. Reference is to PF, 76 / SV1 IV, 240.
God, decides to become an actor in his own play. As Kierkegaard explains in his *Journals and Papers*, history is like a poem of God and God is like a poet, who in Christ introduces himself into his work. If such an act has taken place in history, it goes without saying that it makes up a unique fact as it communicates the purpose of "the absolutely freely acting cause" and serves as the key for the correct understanding of the whole drama of history. Hence, it is no wonder that faith as if pulls the life of Christ out of its historical context and makes it into an eternal event, and it is no mistake to consider it as the absolute event that must have absolute significance even for generations living centuries after it.

It is worth noticing that in Kierkegaard’s view history is ultimately not a simple line of events that follow each other in accordance with causal law, although it may mistakenly be constructed as such by modern scientists. Instead, history is like a drama directed by an almighty director, in which we human beings act as relatively free actors. In going through *Postscript*, Holm notices that history is understood in it in terms of drama, but he does not make much out of it. The conclusion he draws is that since the human individual is acting in that drama, and consequently cannot watch it from the point of view of God and thus know its ultimate purpose, the individual may ignore it altogether and concentrate on his ethical inwardness. But although some statements of Climacus do suggest such an acosmic interpretation, it is clearly a misinterpretation of his thought as a whole. As I have tried to show in the exegesis above, even in *Postscript* the inwardness of the existing subject is always related to the external actuality that makes up its context. Without the context of the historical world, the forms of individual inwardness depicted in *Postscript—*

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1889 *JP* 2, 1391 and 1445 / *Pap.* X 1 A 605 and XI 2 A 98.
1890 Cf. *Holm* 1952, 94.
1892 See *Holm* 1952, 86 and 89.
irony, religious suffering, humor, repentance, and Christian faith—would make little sense. However, Holm nowhere considers how the existing subject is situated and how he situates himself in the historical actuality, and how the stages of existence are related to their historical context.

More generally the defect in Holm’s treatise is that he has concentrated on the works by Climacus and Anti-Climacus only and ignored the rich material relevant to his topic in the other texts by Kierkegaard. As we have seen above in *The Concept of Irony*, irony as a stance of the subject is related to the historical actuality in ancient Greece and in the modern, spiritless Europe. In *Either/Or* the ethical striving of the subject is consistently situated in the historical actuality. In *The Concept of Anxiety* sinfulness of the race historically determines the existence of every subject. And in *The Point of View* Kierkegaard describes how Governance may use even the chains of causes and effects to bring the ethical-religious individual up in the historical actuality.

The merit of Holm’s work is that it takes into consideration a topic that had and has been neglected in Kierkegaard research. Moreover, it manages to bring out the difference between scientific understanding and Kierkegaard’s ethical-religious understanding of history. Holm himself seems to take for granted that the apprehension of historical actuality should be scientific and nowhere considers that perhaps Kierkegaard’s approach to the

1893 The only other monograph on Kierkegaard’s view on history that I have come across is *Geschichte und Ewigkeit bei Sören Kierkegaard* (1968) by Anne-marie Pieper. Pieper’s study is more comprehensive than that of Holm’s as it takes into account *Either/Or, The Concept of Anxiety, and Sickness unto Death*, which Holm neglects. However, Pieper tries to translate Kierkegaard’s religious approach to history into the language of philosophy and, in my view, thereby misses what is different in his approach from that of philosophers. More recently, H. C. Wind has published an article on the topic (see *Wind* 2001). In the research written in English the topic is discussed in *Collins* 1972, 166–174, and in *Taylor* 1975, 111–112, 275–276, 296–307, 333–340, and 356–368.
historical actuality did not purport to be scientific in the first place. All the same, he still manages to point in the right direction by claiming that Kierkegaard’s approach was “fictionalist.” With “fictionalism” Holm refers to the view of the neo-Kantian Hans Vaihinger, according to whom useful fictions that are known not to correspond with empirical reality are legitimate both in science and in ethics. In a sense, Kierkegaard has, indeed, a fictionalist approach to the historical actuality, since he relies openly on imagination, passion, and faith and on the analogy of drama. However, in contrast to Vaihinger’s “as if” philosophy, for Kierkegaard fictions do correspond with the historical actuality and are the adequate means to apprehend it, i.e. the means to apprehend the actuality of free and relatively free spirits that always transcends the empirically given. In other words, Kierkegaard radically challenges the modern scientific approach shared by neo-Kantians and scientific realists alike.

Kierkegaard’s argument against the moderns could be construed as follows: If historical actuality consisted only of empirical phenomena necessarily caused by other empirical phenomena in accordance with the causal law, then ethical and religious fictions could not adequately correspond to it, but would be at most necessary illusions. But what if the real subject matter of history are free spirits, who are always situated in the historically determined empirical and social actuality, but who are also able (partly) to transcend their situatedness and to shape their situation in accordance with their imagination, passion, and will? Is it then possible to apprehend their (relatively) free moves scientifically, is it possible to explain and predict their moves on the basis of causal laws? And what if historical actuality is fundamentally sustained by divine Governance? Can there still be a scientific way to show how this Governance necessarily must act in the historical actuality?

\[1894\] Holm 1952, 117–118.
Whether Kierkegaard’s ethical-religious approach to the historical actuality can in the end be defended against modern critics is another issue. First of all, Kierkegaard’s way of conceiving historical actuality should be explicated and understood. Otherwise we come to think like Holm that his approach is just a bad scientific or philosophical approach to history, whereas actually it is an approach of an altogether different kind. As such, Kierkegaard’s approach to the historical actuality has been discussed very little in Kierkegaard research, although Karl Löwith already recognized in his From Hegel to Nietzsche (Von Hegel zu Nietzsche, 1941) that “seeing himself as a ‘corrective against the age,’ Kierkegaard viewed himself historically, and oriented his task according to the character of the age.” Agreeing with the judgment of Löwith, I have in this study tried to clarify, with the help of the ideal of living poetically coined by Kierkegaard himself, how Kierkegaard understood the historical actuality and how he orientated himself in it.

9.2.2 Kierkegaard’s Social and Political Thought

When it comes to the social and political aspects of Kierkegaard’s thinking, Kierkegaard has often been criticized as a religious individualist who is either completely at odds with the given social actuality or at least neglects it as unimportant for his higher interests. For example, Torsten Bohlin presented Kierkegaard’s individualistic ethical view as totally negative towards social actuality in his Sören Kierkegaards etiska åskådning (Sören Kierkegaard’s Conception on Ethics, 1918). In his study Bohlin went through Kierkegaard’s oeuvre and outlined a development, in which the ethical-religious ideal of “the single individual” becomes emphasized more and more unconditionally. In Bohlin’s interpretation

Löwith 1964, 111. Sensitivity for the significance of the given historical actuality for Kierkegaard is displayed also by Hermann Diem; see Diem 1966, 7–17.
the ideal of “the single individual” signifies radical isolation, denial of the possibility of social manifestations of Christianity, indifference towards temporal tasks and concrete action, and martyrdom that excludes sociability. Another classic critic is Theodor Adorno who claimed in his article “On Kierkegaard’s Doctrine of Love” (1939) that Kierkegaard’s doctrine of love threatens to transform Christian love into “the darkest hatred of man” and his insistence on inwardness “actually leaves the world to the devil.” According to Adorno, the problem of Kierkegaard was the “abstractness” of his category of the neighbor. Besides abstractness, Kierkegaard was guilty of “stubborn maintenance of the ‘given-ness’ of social order,” a maintenance which is “socially conformist and ready to lend its arm to oppression and misanthropy.” Critics by Bohlin and Adorno are symptomatic. For a long time, the prevailing view, if not the only one, seems to have been that social and political viewpoints did not play any significant role in Kierkegaard’s religious and individualistic thought.

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1897 Adorno 1939–1949, 417–421. On the other hand, Adorno praises Kierkegaard for having “actually grasped the instant, that is to say, his own historical situation.” Adorno refers to criticism Kierkegaard directed against 19th century development optimism, the contemporary reification of man, and the mass information that in Kierkegaard’s time began to substitute spontaneous thinking. (See ibid, 423–424.)
1898 In Kierkegaard research other famous interpretations of Kierkegaard as an individualist that neglected the social actuality are Buber 1947 and Lukács 1981, 243–305. To ascertain that the interpretation has been widespread, see, for example, Grene 1948, 39–40, Niebuhr 1951, 243–244, and Zuidema 1974, 18–19. The force of the individualistic interpretation shows in, for example, Mark C. Taylor and Heidi Liehu, who although they have better overall views of Kierkegaard’s position, still present and partly criticize Kierkegaard as a radical individualist. (See Taylor 1975, 369–271; Taylor 1980, 179; and Liehu 1990, 303–306.)
In the last few decades, however, Kierkegaard’s social and political thought has received quite a bit of reconsideration. In his *Søren Kierkegaard og den menige mand* (Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man, 1961) Jørgen Bukdahl presented material from Kierkegaard’s texts that effectively counters the accusations for misanthropy, indifference, and conservatism by Adorno and others. Bukdahl’s essay showed that Kierkegaard was consistently, and in defiance of the conservative circles of his times, loyal and sympathetic to the common man.\(^{1899}\) In his perceptive study “*Hvad siger Brand-Majoren?*” (“What Does the Fire-Chief Say?” 1973) Kresten Nordentoft went through the development of Kierkegaard’s socio-political thought that finally led him to attack Christendom openly in 1854–1855. In his work Nordentoft showed that Kierkegaard was very much aware of what happened around him and adjusted his strategies in accordance with the political situations. He argued that Kierkegaard’s attack on the state church was not an irrational act of a desperate man, but a vigorous attempt by “the fire-chief” to do what was necessary to defend Christianity against corruption, i.e. an attempt to burn down the state church.\(^{1900}\) In his comprehensive study *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (1990) Bruce Kirmmse confirmed the results of Bukdahl and Nordentoft. Through an extensive study of Kierkegaard’s socio-cultural background and through a minute exegesis of Kierkegaard’s texts from 1846 onwards, Kirmmse showed that Kierkegaard keenly considered the political ideas and closely followed the political events of his time, and took a consistent stand with respect to both in his texts. Kirmmse argued that in the social and political context of his time Kierkegaard was, rather than a typical conservative, a radical egalitarian who renounced the elitism typical to the eminents of the Golden Age in Danish culture

\(^{1899}\) See Bukdahl 1970.

\(^{1900}\) See Nordentoft 1973.
While Kierkegaard was critical towards the political mass movements, in his own Christian way he was at least as progressive in his overall political thought as the liberals and socialists of his times.1901

Besides historical studies that through a minute exegesis of Kierkegaard’s texts bring out his social and political thought, studies have also come out that argue for the significance of Kierkegaard’s approach vis-à-vis other approaches. In his *Kierkegaard* (1982), Alastair Hannay refutes the Marxist critique of Kierkegaard as an abstract thinker. Hannay argues that, if the Marxists and other social philosophers neglect the significance of ethical individuals for the creation of a just and harmonious community, the blame of abstraction will fall on themselves. Moreover, it is a strength of the Kierkegaardian ethical subject to have the ground for his ethical action in the infinite: it makes him able to overcome the imperfection of finitude and to endure the suffering that all of us will inevitable meet in this life.1902 In his *Kierkegaard’s Critique of Reason and Society* (1987) Merold Westphal brings Kierkegaard into dialogue with both Marx and Nietzsche, and argues that at the end of the 20th century Kierkegaard is at least as actual for the current social and political philosophy as these other classics of the 19th century. According to Westphal, in criticizing bourgeois Christendom, Kierkegaard provides a critique of ideological consciousness and practice similar to that provided by Marx and the members of the Frankfurt School. His ideology critique only aims at the authentically religious, not at atheistic practice. On the other hand, Kierkegaard criticizes mass society and the spiritless herd mentality like Nietzsche did. But as a cure against these he

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1901 See Kirmmse 1990.
Champions the sovereignty of Good and God, not the sovereignty of the will of the superhuman.$^\text{1903}$

The evidence and arguments presented above and in other studies are, of course, open to discussion. One may still stick to the host of passages in Kierkegaard’s texts that corroborate the fossilized standard view that Kierkegaard was an asocial, conservative individualist that hated the world and humanity. Moreover, if one champions sociological or philosophical theories that claim priority for the collective and objective over the individual and subjective, one may certainly still criticize Kierkegaard for being an individualist and subjectivist. It is also certain that with its uncompromising emphasis on the spiritual, Kierkegaard’s social and political thought will always remain highly “controversial.”$^\text{1904}$ However, after the publication of these works by Kierkegaard scholars, it is hard to deny that Kierkegaard took the social and political actuality into consideration in his ethical-religious thought.

What has received less attention is how Kierkegaard situated the subject in the social and political actuality and how Kierkegaard’s views on the existing subject and the stages of existence relate to his social and political thought. The focus of the studies on Kierkegaard’s social and political thought has often been on the authorship that follows Concluding Unscientific Postscript and the attack on Christendom 1854–1855. The ideas presented in The Concept of Irony, in Either/Or, and in other pseudonymous works, which prepare the way for his subsequent social and political thinking, have not received due attention. The result has some-


$^\text{1904}$ Cf. Malantschuk 1976, 7.
times been a postulation of two Kierkegaards. First there was the politically naïve or indifferent thinker that occupied himself exclusively with subjective inwardness. Then something happened in the external reality, namely, the affair with Corsaren and the political events of 1848 with the result that Kierkegaard was socially and politically awakened and emerged as a critical thinker.\footnote{The above description is, perhaps, a bit caricatured, but I believe it captures the general tendency of the interpretation, for example, in Nordentoft 1973, Sløk 1980, Elrod 1981, and Kirmmse 1990. All these studies read quite a bit of development (or, in the case of Sløk, degeneration) into Kierkegaard’s thought. In contrast, my reading has looked for the continuity in it by situating the Kierkegaardian subject into its context right in the beginning. There is no room in this study to enter a detailed discussion, but in brief my theses against the “development theories” are, first, that the situatedness of the subject in the social and political actuality is already taken into consideration in the early authorship and, second, that the criticism of Christendom is already there immanently. In the later authorship the criticism just becomes expressed more polemically. But the guiding ideas behind the polemical action are already familiar to us from the early authorship.}

With my reading of The Concept of Irony and the pseudonymous authorship, I have tried to present an alternative view by taking a new approach into Kierkegaard’s social and political thought. By taking the ideal of living poetically and the idea of the situatedness of the subject as my clues in reading the pseudonymous authorship, I have tried to counter in a more radical way the interpretation by Bohlin and others that Kierkegaard was an individualist and subjectivist. If my reading is correct, the individualist and subjectivist reading does not apply in any part of Kierkegaard’s authorship. There is no space for radical isolation, no denial of the possibility of social manifestations of Christianity, no indifference towards temporal tasks and concrete action, and no martyrdom that excludes sociability in Kierkegaard’s universe. In accordance with the ideal of living poetically, the Kierkegaardian subject is always situated in his social and political context, and is
never isolated. His Christian inwardness depends on the given social manifestations of Christianity, on Christian traditions, on the Bible, and on the sacraments of the Church that serve as occasions for the leap of faith. His task to become “the single individual” equals becoming “individuum” and implies temporal tasks and concrete action in human society. His possible martyrdom, if demanded by his times and his society, is for the sake of his contemporaries and is an expression of Christian neighborly love.1906

On the other hand, the ideal of living poetically and the idea of situatedness pay tribute to the subject-centeredness of Kierkegaard’s social and political thought. They preserve the perspective of the first person singular that is also essential for his social and political thought. Moreover, keeping them in sight helps us to perceive the difference between his unscientific, religious approach, and the scientific and philosophical approaches to the social actuality.

### 9.2.3 Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker

In Kierkegaard research the issue of what Kierkegaard should be considered as is most often avoided, perhaps with the idea that if we just keep quiet about it, Kierkegaard’s ideas may be developed without further ado within established scholarly disciplines and along the lines of established philosophical and theological traditions.1907 However, Kierkegaard explicitly identified himself as a religious author and not as a philosopher1908 and he was acutely conscious of the differences between philosophy and Christian-

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1907 Of contemporary Kierkegaard scholars, Alastair Hannay has kept Kierkegaard’s heterogeneity with philosophical traditions continuously in his sight. See, for example, Hannay 1997.
ity, and between a philosophical doctrine and the Christian existence-communication. On the other hand, he considered it a mistake on the part of theology to try to appear scientific instead of sticking to ethics, and he distinguished between scholarly and Christian rigorousness and between reading the Bible religiously and in a scholarly way.

Thus with some reason James Collins has characterized Kierkegaard as a paraphilosophical thinker, i.e. as a thinker, who has "notably reshaped some methods and questions, concepts and living springs of evidence, in modern philosophy," but "whose chief orientation and activities lead him toward some other sphere of creativity." Another famous characterization of Kierkegaard is in the title of Louis Mackey's well-known book, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (1972). For Mackey the characterization "a kind of poet" by no means diminishes the importance of Kierkegaard for philosophy. He writes:

As "a kind of poet" Kierkegaard is perhaps the most extreme antiphilosopher of modern times... But it is also true that in parting company with modern philosophy, Kierkegaard rejoined the *philosophia perennis*. Alongside his vitriolic critique of German speculation must be set Kierkegaard's veneration for the Greeks, and in particular his devotion to Socrates, outranked only by his devotion to Christ.

Mackey maintains that in antiquity and in the Middle Ages philosophy was still poetic as "philosophy had not yet made the claim to absolute knowledge and poetry had not yet been consigned to

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1911 *JP* 3, 2823 / *Pap*. X 5 A 73.
1912 *SUD*, 5–6 / *SV* XI, 117.
1913 *FSE*, 25–35 / *SV* XII, 315–324.
the asylum of irrationality.” However, the poetic character of Kierkegaard’s writing is based not only on the Socratic tradition of philosophy, but also on his religious view of God as a kind of poet, whom human individuals, in all humbleness, ought to imitate.

These characterizations by Collins and Mackey are still useful in reinstating the Kierkegaadian point of view in its opposition to the academic philosophical and theological discussion. Kierkegaard was not a scientific philosopher or theologian, who tried to determine objectively the eternal truth in concepts, but rather “a kind of poet,” namely, a poet who paradoxically strove towards actuality. To acknowledge this does not make his work less significant. Quite the contrary, Kierkegaard is still worth serious consideration precisely as a “paraphilosopher,” who tried to reach the level that precedes scholarly and scientific discussions. Instead of becoming apologetic, instead of begging the scientific community to accept our Kierkegaard as a respectable academic despite what he did and wrote himself, we must rather turn the tables and let Kierkegaard’s point of view challenge us. As Alastair Hannay has suggested, Kierkegaard has perhaps on purpose attempted to do “something other but more important or close to home, something more fundamental even, than philosophy.”

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1915 Mackey 1971, 268.
1917 This is a slightly different use of the idiom than Mackey’s.
1918 I put the term paraphilosopher here to a different use than what Collins did. For Collins the term paraphilosopher served as a methodological tool for limiting the interest of a historian of philosophy to those areas of Kierkegaard’s thought relevant to philosophy proper (see Collins 1972, 242–245). For me the term suggests that as existing human beings we should follow Kierkegaard’s example and remain open to the life underlying and surrounding well-defined academic discourses, including philosophy.
1919 Hannay 1997, 239.
Of course, taking Kierkegaard as a paraphilosopher and a kind of poet does not make disciplined philosophical and theological approaches into his thought completely invalid and useless. Kierkegaard’s paraphilosophical project assumes the truth of the basic Christian doctrines and the existence of Christian practices. In order to understand Kierkegaard, it is important to recognize this and to clarify the role the doctrines and practices play in his authorship.\footnote{Systematic analyses of Kierkegaard’s theology have been provided, for example, by Bohlin (1925), Dupré (1963), Come (1997), and Rose (2001). A study into Kierkegaard’s Christian thought that takes into consideration its difference from the academic theology is Gouwens 1996. In Finnish research, Kierkegaard’s theological views have been considered in Ukkola 1961 and 1964, and in Vainio 2003 and 2004.} Moreover, Kierkegaard’s paraphilosophical project is backed up by the philosophical reflections of Johannes Climacus.\footnote{The point has been made by Alastair Hannay. Despite his (more recent) hesitations for calling Kierkegaard a philosopher, Hannay maintains in his Kierkegaard (1982) that the religious thought of Kierkegaard has a “philosophical aspect or indeed basis.” In consequence Hannay considers Kierkegaard in his book as “a kind of philosopher.” (See Hannay 1982, 10–12.) In his book, Hannay develops out of Kierkegaard’s texts a consistent and comprehensive philosophical view that contains ontology, epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy. The philosophy of Climacus in particular has been analyzed systematically by Evans (1983).} Climacus defends the principle of contradiction and takes the reality of the eternal concepts of reason as granted. But, on the other hand, he consistently keeps hold of the distinction between ideal being and factual being, between thoughts and changeable existence, and points out that what is valid in the eternal sphere of thought does not by itself, without the ethical-religious activity of the human subjects, become valid in human life. Furthermore, Climacus argues that the pure knowledge of reason is deficient, because it is abstract and does not reach the depth of human existence, and powerless, because it cannot by
itself rule it. However, this criticism of rationalism does not make Climacus into an empiricist. He also argues that our empirical knowledge is always imperfect and that the scientific research of empirical facts can never reach the part of reality that is essential to us human beings: the spheres of freedom, that is, the sphere of subjectivity and the core of historical actuality. Thus, Climacus claims that the fundamental truth cannot be discovered either by reason or by empirical research, and instead of the objective, scientific approach, he assumes the subjective, ethical-religious approach to the truth. He seeks the truth that applies to ethical human existence and uncovers an ethical-religious dialectic that points towards the Christian revelation that meets human beings through historical actuality.  

But inasmuch as Climacus makes the subjective existence as the locus of truth, may we not say that the foundation of his thought is the phenomenon of subjective existence? And if we may, why could we not treat his ideas as contributions to existential phenomenology or, if we complement the works by Climacus with the treatises by Vigilius Haufniensis and Anti-Climacus in Christian psychology, as contributions to phenomenological theology? This approach has won some popularity among Kierkegaard scholars. His work has been assimilated with phenomenological research, for example, by Michael Theunissen, George J. Stack, Arnold B. Come, Arne Grøn, and Pia Søltoft.

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1924 See Stack 1977.


The reason why, I think, Kierkegaard’s thinking should not be assimilated with phenomenology is that his thinking is not neutral as the description of phenomena, in my understanding, ought to be in the philosophical science of phenomenology, regardless of whether phenomenology is practiced in the Hegelian or in the Husserlian tradition. Kierkegaard’s reflection on existence always seems to be already ethically and religiously determined. Ethical and religious passions, will, and imagination are contemporaneous with thinking and determine it. Does not this disqualify Kierkegaard’s thinking as phenomenological and, more generally, as scientific at least in the modern sense of the word? Concluding from the name of his *Unscientific Postscript*, Climacus, at least, appears to think that it does. Rather than consider the reflection of Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms as phenomenology, we could perhaps consider it as “dogmatic phenomenology.” But given the meaning attached to the term phenomenology in the philosophical traditions mentioned above, a dogmatic phenomenology is a contradiction in terms.

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1928 So even in *Either/Or*, Part I. A healthy naturalist would never draw such a morbid picture of aesthetic existence.
1929 For a more thorough critique of the phenomenological approach to Kierkegaard, see Pattison 2002, 70–85. Pattison points out that the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger “orients itself by and towards the light of that which shows itself as what it is.” Similarly, in the phenomenology of Hegel “that which is disclosed in the phenomenological approach to consciousness is a history that had to be as and how it showed itself to be.” (Pattison 2002, 77.) Pattison writes that “it is this that gives the phenomenologies of Hegel, Husserl, and (early) Heidegger their claim to be forms of science rather than imaginative evocations of particular ways of viewing the world. To look at the world is to see it as it is.” (Ibid, 77–78.) Not so with Kierkegaard, claims Pattison. For him the phenomena are intrinsically ambiguous and open to different interpretations, so that the interpretation becomes the task of a free spirit. (Ibid, 78–80.) And when Kierkegaard interprets phenomena in a determinate manner, as he does in his treatises in Christian psychology, he does not pretend that he is just letting the
Hence, the term “phenomenology” does not seem appropriate as an overall characterization for the reflection that Kierkegaard practiced. But, of course, neither can his approach be assimilated with analytical philosophy or theology. He did not practice phenomenological science in the Hegelian or Husserlian manner, but neither did he restrict himself to impartial conceptual analysis of scientific and other forms of language and thought. While he did practice conceptual analysis and a kind of (poetic) phenomenological description, he practiced both with certain presupposed ethical-religious interests, personally engaged in his historical situation, and seeking to clarify the revelation he already believed in or at least wanted to believe in. In accordance, he did not just let the “logos” or “phenomena” “show themselves from themselves” in his writings. Instead, he used language in a poetic and exhortative way to make us believe in what is highly improbable and even at best only possible. In other words, the philosophy of Climacus and the Christian psychology of Anti-Climacus serve Kierkegaard’s paraphilosophical project—becoming a Christian in phenomena manifest themselves as they are. He does not claim that he is deciphering the phenomena without presuppositions, but acknowledges that his interpretations are based on dogmatic presuppositions. Thus, “it is a presupposition, a fore-conception that guides, rather than results from, the investigation itself.” (Ibid, 84.) Thereby the “global ambitions” of Hegelian, Husserlian, and Heideggerian phenomenologies are clearly given up, for the dogmatic presuppositions with which Kierkegaard operates are shared only by the believers and thus there is no way to found a universal science on them. (Ibid, 84–85.) For a critique of the phenomenological approach to Kierkegaard, see also Kylläinen 2000, 68–99.

1930 Cf. Heidegger’s definition of phenomenology in Sein und Zeit, § 7. C: “Phänomenologien sagt dann apofainesthai ta fainomena: Das was sich zeigt, sowie es sich von ihm selbst her zeigt, von ihm selbst her sehen lassen.” (Heidegger 1972, 34.) In my view, a similar attitude characterizes explication of the concepts, for example in Socratic dialogues and in analytical philosophy.
Christendom—and from this paraphilosophical project comes the unscientific urgency in his writings.

This brings us back to the topic of situatedness. In Kierkegaard’s thinking human existence is not the fundamental foundation, but human existence is at every moment based on the God-relationship. The exegesis above has tried to show that part of this relationship is that the existing human being is situated by God in the historical actuality, in and through which he encounters God. The exegesis has tried to clarify how the Kierkegaardian subject takes his situatedness in the historical and social actuality into consideration. On the basis of the exegesis I would argue that as a religious thinker Kierkegaard is a “paraphilosopher” not only in the sense that his thinking was directed towards a religious goal, that of becoming a Christian, but also because he attempted to be receptive to the historical and social actuality preceding and surrounding well-defined academic discourses. If Kierkegaard’s project is also understood as “paraphilosophy” in this sense, it gives current significance for Kierkegaard’s project in that it creates a connection with the projects of 20th century philosophy that have attempted the same. Again, I do not mean that Kierkegaard should be assimilated with some modern or postmodern philosophy but, on the contrary, that he should be considered as a religious alternative to them. I will attempt to point out briefly what I mean.

Even if the term has not been used in all these philosophical traditions, we may say that the issue of situatedness of human thought has been considered in the phenomenological, existentialist, and hermeneutical traditions, in the tradition based on the work of the late Wittgenstein, and in the traditions inspired by human and social sciences such as critical theory, structuralism and poststructuralism. When the philosophers and sociologists who were brought up in these traditions (Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer, Habermas, Winch, MacIntyre, Giddens, Foucault, Der-
rida, and Lyotard, etc.) have investigated the historical and social context that gives structure to the experience of the individual subject, they have reflected on the historical traditions, the social practices, and the structures of language and culture that, preceding (and within) the intentional activity of the subjects, creates the situation in which the subjects think and act. In these philosophical projects, however, reflection and theoretical activity that wants to remain religiously neutral has had priority in the intellectual orientation. In consequence, even if such reflection may have taken God into consideration as the absolute other, God has all the same become determined from the point of view of this disinterested theoretical activity. This is, I suppose, how it should be in the philosophic and scientific traditions that want to first bring what truly exists into the light of consciousness, before they give permission to relate oneself to it in an obedient way. Given the Greek and Enlightenment traditions of critical thinking and their ideals of objectivity and universality, the orientation is understandable. For the conscientious modern philosophers and scientists it appears as the only legitimate one, does it not? However, in my understanding it differs from the way a religious individual orientates in his life, and Kierkegaard’s case serves to bring this to light.

As a religious thinker and as a representative of ethical-religious situatedness, Kierkegaard assumes that the subject that exists in the world is already in a constant ethical and religious relation to God. This is the guiding idea that also informs his hermeneutics of human existence, which accordingly may be termed ethical-religious hermeneutics. In interpreting human situatedness his method is not purely descriptive or analytic, but a combination of ethical-religious hypotheses and engagements. When it proceeds deeper into the historical actuality and tries to uncover deeper levels of meaning and truth, his hermeneutics does not proceed in scientifically controlled, immanent circles, but in leaps, “hypo-
thetic-resolutely,” i.e. by projecting possibilities and then actualizing them through belief and action. These “leaps” of spirit are carried and informed by passion and imagination. Although they aim at a consistent life, in which there is meaning and continuity, and although they are guided by a consistent life-view, the life-view that guides the life does not rest on the results of scientific or philosophical research, but on ethical-religious passion and imagination.

Kierkegaard’s ethical-religious way of understanding his situatedness and to situate himself in the given actuality does not differ by type only from the ways of modern philosophers, but also from the ways of modern men in general, who have been brought up and educated in our secularized post-Enlightenment culture. Kierkegaard was well aware of this from the beginning as he made living poetically his ethical-religious ideal in *The Concept of Irony* in defiance not only of Hegel, but also in defiance of the prudent bourgeoisie. By assuming the ideal of living poetically he took a stance against both ways of living reasonably.

### 9.2.4 Living Poetically—Living Reasonably

But if Kierkegaard championed a version of living poetically against all forms of living reasonably, does that not make him liable to charges of irrationalism? For is it not pure and bare irrationalism to champion living poetically against living reasonably? At least since Lev Shestov’s *Kierkegaard et la philosophie existentielle* (*Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, 1936), Kierkegaard has had the stamp of an irrationalist on his forehead that has greatly helped to typify him as an existentialist who rebelled against occidental rationalism.\(^\text{1931}\) Over the years many Kierke-

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gaard scholars have done their best to erase this stamp and the
one-sided readings and critique of Kierkegaard that it breeds. It
has been pointed out that “the paradox” of Kierkegaard is not
altogether “absurd,” but that it is determined by understanding,
and that it is what understanding constantly seeks. It has also been
pointed out that Kierkegaard’s critique of rationalism was aimed
first and foremost at the presumptuous and megalomaniac forms
that the rationalistic tradition had taken, for example, in Hegeli-
anism. Now, it seems, the efforts of these scholars have borne
fruit and the irrationalist interpretations have fallen out of favor at
least among Kierkegaard scholars. At least the jacket of a recent
collection of essays, which aims to correct Alasdair MacIntyre’s
influential reading of Kierkegaard as an irrationalist in his After
Virtue (1981), speaks about the emergence of a new “anti-
irrationalist” consensus. Do I now want to defy this consensus
and take sides with the critics by claiming that Kierkegaard was,
after all, an irrationalist who argued against living reasonably?

No and yes. It is not my intention to again turn Kierkegaard
into an irrationalist, for I do believe that there are good reasons for
a human being to prefer living poetically. Therefore, choosing that
option cannot be considered simply as irrational. However, I be-
lieve that the rationality inherent in his ideal of living poetically
challenges both the rationality typical to modern common sense
and the rationality cherished by philosophers and scientists
through centuries and today. In the following I try to outline
Kierkegaard’s opposition to the narrow-minded rationality
and his opposition to both the modern and the older forms of “living
reasonably.”

Kierkegaard’s ideal of living poetically opposes at least all those
modern forms of living reasonably that identify rationality with a

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1933 See Davenport & Rudd 2001.
smart (= conformist) adaptation to this world. In criticizing bourgeois mentality, the finite common sense, spiritlessness, the despair of finitude, and the despair of necessity, Kierkegaard opposes a “rational” adaptation to society, which may bring (apparent) success in this world, but at the cost of the ethical and the God-relationship.\textsuperscript{1934} He is as critical against “rational” adaptation to the nature with the help of empirical sciences and technology, if it takes place at the cost of the ethical and the God-relationship.\textsuperscript{1935} In both cases the human being situates himself in the given actuality in the wrong way. However, opposition against these forms of “rationality” does not make Kierkegaard into an irrationalist. Kierkegaard might very well argue that social, political, scientific, and technological calculation do not exemplify human rationality as a whole, but that they exemplify some inhuman distortions of it inasmuch as they do away with respect for the eternal and infinite. For if it holds good that the human spirit and the highest good is essentially related to the eternal and infinite, then it is not rational to rely exclusively on finite understanding, calculation, and common sense.\textsuperscript{1936}

Hence, Kierkegaard has his reasons to be critical of the forms of living reasonably that, to me at least, seem to be prevalent in the modern age. From his point of view, these represent illusory forms

\textsuperscript{1934} See chapters 1, 2, 5, and 7 above.

\textsuperscript{1935} See JP 3, 2807–2824.

\textsuperscript{1936} Arguing against the Marxist, and for the Kierkegaardian, ideal of human happiness, Alastair Hannay makes a similar point: once the human being becomes aware of finitude as imperfection, no reordering of the finite realm will ever make him perfectly happy, if his relation to the infinite is not in order. (See Hannay 1982, 320–322.) The anthropological argument for the existence of God that Arne Grøn has developed on basis of The Sickness unto Death captures the same intuition: if the human being does not ground his existence in God, he remains in despair; therefore, the fact that we are in despair points towards the existence of God and towards our need to relate to God. (Grøn 1997, 291–297.)
of rationality and erroneous ways of situating oneself in the given world. On the theoretical level curiosity about the external world makes one forget the essential; on the practical level selfish use and manipulation of the external world supersedes ethical action. That is not in the true interests of any human individual and neither does it serve to actualize in the world “a rational order of things in which every human being...fills his place.” Instead of rational human action that is governed by the eternal, modern “rationality,” which is actually just shortsighted, opportunistic reaction to the empirical events, amounts to a vortex. According to Kierkegaard, this is especially typical of political movements in the modern age. Witnessing the chaotic events of 1848, he complains:

Anyone with a developed conception of what it is to act will by closer inspection easily see that around Europe no action whatsoever has taken place, that all that has happened disintegrates into events, incidents, or that something happens, something enormous, but without there being an acting personality that would in advance know what he wants, so that he afterwards could tell whether what he wanted has occurred or not...But men still have a little remnant of a conception of what it means to be a free, rational being. To rescue this conception, they have to fabricate that what has occurred is what they wanted to occur...[I]n the end the changeable world [Tilværelsen] has to acknowledge paternity for what occurs in the world of free rational beings...so that these upheavals will be considered in a meaningless and inhuman way as phenomena of nature and revolutions take place and republics come into being in the same manner as cholera.

Kierkegaard’s point is that as long as the subjective relation to the eternal and infinite is lacking, reacting to objective facts remains irrational behavior and the result is a vortex of ungoverned

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1937 Cf. EO2, 292 / SV1 II, 262.
1938 BA, 316–317 / Pap IX B 24, pp. 322–323. (Translation slightly altered.)
Kierkegaard could no doubt have applied the same analysis to the political and economical developments that have taken place in Europe and globally after his death, and in the globalized world he could with good reason claim that no one really governs and takes care of the good of concrete individuals, as long as politics is just a game in which things just take place.

In subdivision 8.2 we saw that the Socratic emphasis on the single individual was Kierkegaard’s antidote against this irrationality, i.e. against the prudent, calculating “rationality” that inspires and moves the modern political and economic vortex. Having recourse to Socrates, Kierkegaard pits the ethical individualism of this classic philosopher against this modern irrationality. Is Kierkegaard’s ideal, then, closer to the rationality of Greek philosophers? Philosophers in ancient Greece were against irrational vortexes of all kinds and presented models of living reasonably that aimed at the upbringing of individuals (paideta). Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms do venerate ancient philosophers and there is reason to claim, for example, that he is in some respects much closer to classical virtue ethics than existentialism, and that his “anthropocentric” realism has more in common with premodern rationalism than with postmodern relativism. On the other hand, Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms show an appreciation of representatives of the Enlightenment such as Lessing and the playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754). Kierkegaard scholars have also found many affinities between Kierkegaard and Kant that suggest congruence in their overall orientation. Like philosophers in ancient Greece, Enlightenment thinkers wanted to

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1940 See PV, 108 / SVI XIII, 594. For further references, see Nordentoft 1973, 99–112.
1941 See Roberts 1998.
apply reason to actual human life in a way that would be upbring-
ing and edifying. We could say that they, too, championed an ideal of living reasonably. How, then, does Kierkegaard’s ideal of living poetically relate to the Greek and Enlightenment ideals of living reasonably?

Since it is “better well hanged than ill wed,” it is better that we check first what the representatives of Greek and Enlighten-
ment rationality could say against Kierkegaard’s projects of living poetically explicated in this study. First, they could claim that passion and imagination have too dominating a role in Kierkegaard’s ethical-religious projects. Not denying the significance of passion and imagination altogether, the Greek and the Enlightenment thinkers (with the exception of Rousseau) would no doubt argue that it goes too far in demanding that thinking should not be superior, but coordinate to imagination and feeling. They would argue that thinking should be considered as superior and reason as the hegemon, the leader and ruler, for where reason does not rule in human life, the sense of reality will be lost. Imagination and passions are affected by the changeable and finite world, and only critical reflection and reason are able to raise human beings above its relativism, so that they may reach the permanently valid, objective truths that have their grounding in what is essential and real.

How could Kierkegaard’s ideal of living poetically be defended against such criticism? It could be argued that imagination and passion are in fact the key for human beings to apprehend what is unknown to them. It could be argued that, as a matter of fact, it is through imagination and passion that the human spirit relates to the actuality of other human spirits and God. Thus, imagination and passion are not an impediment for overcoming our finite point of view. On the contrary, they are what carries us over the

1944 The motto of Philosophical Fragments.
1945 Cf. CUP, 346–347 / SVII VII, 300.
limits of our finite existence and what makes us apprehend that which lies beyond the sphere of the first person singular. Thus, they do not hinder the human striving for the universal truth but serve an essential role in it. Furthermore, imagination and passion are also the media through which human beings, even in our time, relate themselves to the eternal. It would seem that especially in the post-Enlightenment age, after the general rejection of rationalistic metaphysics, the need and role of imagination and passion could become clear at least to those philosophers, who still hanker after the eternal and infinite that used to form the ground for the ethical striving of philosophers and common men alike. In the modern age dominated by empiricist, Kantian, and positivist ways of thinking, most philosophers have lost their faith in the universality of reason and in its inherent capacity to attain certain knowledge of the eternal, cosmic order, in which human life unfolds itself. But while it is hard for most of us to believe, as Platonists, Aristotelians, or Stoics believed, that apodictic knowledge on eternal ideas, essences, and forms of life is available to our reason, it is perhaps easier to recognize that with the help of imagination and passion human beings as a matter of fact still ground their ethical existence in what is unknown to them: in the infinite and eternal that transcends the sphere of their knowledge. Having recognized this, the next step is to question the correctness of the prejudice that passion and imagination are informed by the changeable world only and not by what transcends it. Perhaps the appropriate passions, the passions of faith and love, are able to apprehend the eternal. If there is no return to premodern science, perhaps we may still hang on to what is eternal and absolute with the help of passion and imagination.

For example, Ferreira, Søltoft, and Furtak have suggested in their studies that passions and imagination fulfill our being precisely in that they open us to the unknown other.
On the other hand, on the basis of Kierkegaard’s texts it is also possible to turn the defense into offense and criticize the Greek and Enlightenment traditions for handing the hegemony in human life to abstract reason. Despite his criticism of Hegel, Kierkegaard seems to share with him the view that the Socratic and Kantian dualistic position is something that must be overcome. In *The Concept of Irony* Socrates represents the abstract philosopher, who does not know how to reach the ground of his existence after the moment of abstraction and thus remains floating above the ground in his irony.\(^{1947}\) Later, in *Either/Or* and in *Johannes Climacus*, reflection that separates the eternal from the temporal is seen as an unavoidable but dangerous intermediate stage in the development of human spirit.\(^{1948}\) According to Judge William, the exit from this stage is possible through love, ethical choice, and repentance, all of which also involve religious imagination. Following the judge, then, one could argue that the Greek and Enlightenment projects of living reasonably will never take the subject back to the level of changeable actuality, but that to reach it the individual must surrender himself to passion and imagination. It is just simply impossible to relate to the eternal and infinite in the middle of everyday life without passion and imagination.

No doubt, for sober-minded Greek and Enlightenment philosophers, Kierkegaard’s way of overcoming alienation and abstraction still appears as dubious. His Christian project, in particular, seems to sink back into arbitrary and detrimental mythological thinking that was once overcome by the Greek philosopher. The representatives of Greek and Enlightenment traditions could point out that, for example, Kierkegaard’s notion of hereditary sin has neither rational nor sufficient empirical grounding. Of course, Aristotle already recognized the phenomenon of the weakness of

\(^{1947}\) See subdivision 1.1 above.

\(^{1948}\) See subdivision 3.1.1 and the manuscript *Johannes Climacus*, esp. JC, 166–172 / *Pap.* IV B 1, pp. 144–150.
the ethical will (*akrasia*), and Stoics, such as Seneca, were very much aware that human nature is liable to irrational forces. However, in the face of the weakness and wickedness that plague human nature, these exemplary thinkers did not give up their courage and good understanding. They did not postulate an obscure notion of incurable hereditary sin and did not let themselves sink into despair and melancholy. And were they not right in this? Is not the only rational attitude towards a fall, towards a sin committed, to forget it and to live reasonably from now on? What does it help to whine and cry about the past, to waste one’s time and energy in vague repentance, and then finally to cement the fall with a fantastic dogma of hereditary sin that begets more and more despair and anxiety? Instead, one should pull oneself together, learn to forget what belongs to the accidental past, subdue the irrationality that resides in us, and live in accordance with reason in the present time and in the future.

Another example of a detrimental mythological element in Kierkegaard’s Christian project is his fatalistic adherence to the Bible and Governance. For example, Anti-Climacus suggests that Governance could never intend the majority of human beings to appropriate the Christian truth. This would mean that the biblical model of being a Christian would lose its eternal validity: the true Christians would not be tested by persecution in this world anymore. From the educative and optimistic viewpoint of the Enlightenment, this way of thinking is detrimental for it discourages attempts to communicate the truth to all humanity. On the other hand, Anti-Climacus suggests that God’s righteousness shows itself even in his abstaining from punishing “established Christendom.” God’s indifference towards this travesty spells doom for the unrighteous and is an upbringing test for the right-

\[1949\] See PC, 222 / SVI XII, 203–204.
ous.\textsuperscript{1950} But this way of thinking is detrimental in that it discourages attempts to make this world better. At the same time this way of thinking exemplifies an arbitrary interpretation of the will of Governance in history. Not only external punishment but also abstaining from punishment is deciphered as God’s reprimand. Thus it seems that whatever happens in the historical actuality, Kierkegaard turns it into an act of Governance in his mythologizing consciousness. But that means that he turns historical actuality into a myth just as the Romantic ironists did.

How could Kierkegaard’s ideal of living poetically be defended against these criticisms? It could be argued that the religious thinking pertaining to living poetically is not mythological, but subjunctive, and not arbitrary and detrimental, but ethically inevitable. Kierkegaard already distinguishes in his early \textit{Journals and Papers} and then in \textit{The Concept of Irony} between the mythical, which is hypothetical “in the indicative,” and the poetical, which is hypothetical “in the subjunctive,” and does not claim to be more. Mythology compresses the eternal idea into the categories of time and space, thinks of it as identical with empirical actuality, and makes the individual lose himself in fantasy. By contrast, the poetical is always conscious of itself as the poetical and always aware that it deals with possibilities and idealities.\textsuperscript{1951} On the basis of this distinction coined by Kierkegaard, one may claim that the poetic thinking that Kierkegaard operates with uses dogmas in full awareness that they are possibilities only, and that it leads them to clarify the problems that the ethical individual meets as he tries to live according to ethical ideals in the given historical actuality.

Hence, the religious dogmas are not irrational and inhuman mythemes, but they serve a definite function in the human attempt to lead an ethical life in the given actuality. In \textit{The Concept}

\textsuperscript{1950} See \textit{PC}, 231–232 / \textit{SV1} XII, 212.

of Anxiety, Vigilius Haufniensis explicitly dismisses the idea that the narrative in Genesis would be a myth and suggests that it presents the ideal dogmatic explanation, or clarification (Forklaring), on how sin enters the life of the single individual through a free qualitative leap.\footnote{CA, 31–32 and 46 / SV1 IV, 304 and 317 together with CA, 23 / SV1 IV, 295.} The belief in this ideal explanation is in its turn motivated by the need to clarify the shipwreck of ethical striving without giving up the striving itself.\footnote{CA, 16–19 / SV1 IV, 288–292.} Thus, the dogma of hereditary sin is not an arbitrary myth. It is an idea that the individual must use, if he wants to explain, without naturalizing away his freedom and responsibility, what goes wrong in his life and in the lives of the others. And against those who prefer the “therapies of desire” that Greek and Enlightenment philosophies have to offer, one could argue that without the dogma of sin the irrational as such tends to become the evil. While one part of the human soul, the rational part, becomes deified, the other part, the irrational, becomes doomed. One may ask with good reason the question by Edward Young that stand as the motto of Either/Or, Part I: “Is reason then alone baptized, are the passions pagans?”\footnote{Cf. CA, 117 / SV1 IV, 385.} In the light of the philosophical reason the answer tends to be “yes.” In the light of the dogmas of faith and sin, the answer is “no.” But could not the belief in hereditary sin still be regarded as debilitating inasmuch as it makes the mind focus in a morbid and pathological manner on negative phenomena, such as anxiety, melancholy, and despair? It could, of course. But Kierkegaard’s view seems to be that this belief is not debilitating as long as one has the Christian faith that extricates itself from anxiety, melancholy, and despair.\footnote{CA, 31–32 and 46 / SV1 IV, 304 and 317 together with CA, 23 / SV1 IV, 295.} One must remember that sin is the counterpart of faith and that the contemplation of sin aims at faith, not
to incurable pathologies. When contemplating sin and its manifestations in human life, Kierkegaard is at the same time after “thoughts that heal from the ground up [i Grunden],”\textsuperscript{1956} and after the state in which the self “is grounded [grunder] transparently in the power that established it.”\textsuperscript{1957} In other words, his Christian radical cure aims to provide the person with an unshakeable spiritual foundation such that no philosophical, psychological, or psychiatric therapy could provide. Having received the education that anxiety has to offer and having past the school of despair by virtue of faith, the Christian should be able to face all negativities imaginable.

When it then comes to the role of Governance in Kierkegaard’s thinking, the case is pretty much the same. It seems that the complaints raised are unjustified as long as the notion of Governance serves the ethical life of the single individual. It seems indeed that whatever happens in the historical actuality Kierkegaard seems to be able to turn it into an act of Governance. But the way he turns everything into acts of Governance is not arbitrary, but determined by the same will to face and overcome all imaginable negativities which we know from Kierkegaard’s psychology. This will is an integral part of ethical action as it prepares the individual to act ethically without the illusory hope of a victory in time. The ideas mentioned above (that Governance does not intend everyone to appropriate Christianity and that God’s refraining from punishment in time signifies his eternal punishment) do not keep the Christian from witnessing for the truth, from doing his utmost to make his fellow humans see the truth, and from striving to make the world better. According to Kierkegaard’s ideal of living poetically, the adequate response to the imperfection and wickedness of the temporal world is not to become “world-like” (verds-lig), but

\textsuperscript{1956} JP 5, 3273 / Pap. VIII 1 A 558. (Translation slightly altered.)
\textsuperscript{1957} SUD, 14, 49, and 131 / SV1 XI, 128, 160, and 241. (Translation slightly altered.)
to become better oneself and to become human (menneske-lig) in the inhuman world.\footnote{PV, 103–104 / SV1 XIII, 589–590.}

But this only brings us to the third objection that could be made against Kierkegaard’s ideal. That is, the representatives of Greek and Enlightenment traditions could complain that Kierkegaard’s Christian ideal of living poetically is characterized by particularism and persecution complex. Particularism is implied in the notion that the eternal and universally valid truth is revealed through a particular historical event and only to the particular persons that happen to be receptive to that event. On the practical level this particularist notion tends to generate in the believer a persecution complex. The Christian becomes paranoid and starts to think that the others, the sinful pagans and pseudo-Christians, are evil and bound to persecute him because of his Christian faith and his Christian conduct of life. In an actual or imagined conflict situation he does not say like the supporter of the Socratic and Enlightenment projects would say: “Let us discuss the matter and our disagreement over.” He says to himself: “They are in sin and that is why they persecute me. There is no way to discuss with them, for they are not children of God.”\footnote{Cf. PC, 198–199 / SV1 XII, 183–184.} It could be claimed by sober-minded philosophers that Kierkegaard’s particularist Christian way of thinking favors such a persecution complex that blocks the open discussion and the quest for the universal truth.

How could Kierkegaard’s Christian project of living poetically be defended against this criticism? It could be pointed out that in Kierkegaard’s project Christian particularism is dialectically balanced by the ethical universalism typical to the philosophical tradition. In other words, Christian particularism is constantly tested and kept in balance by Socratic humanity. Kierkegaard not only investigates and represents Christianity from the pagan philoso-
phical point of view, his Christianity also opens up and addresses itself to those who think and exist as pagans. It seems that his Christian ideal of living poetically is characterized by a dialectic that wills to understand and address the opponents, because he and his pseudonyms have respect and sympathy for the universally human. As the single individual the Kierkegaardian Christian avoids coteries, parties, and sectarianism in all its forms, and remains “individuum,” i.e. at one with the whole race. He wills to convert the pagans through his personal self-denial and servitude, through the universal neighborly love that is the expression of true humanity. On the other hand, as a sinful human being he may never be sure that he represents the Christian truth himself and that the others, those who persecute him, represent untruth. Thus Christian particularism and the persecution complex that goes along with it are kept in check. At least Kierkegaard himself, who perhaps was not a paragon of Christian virtues in all respects, did try to communicate what Christianity is about in such a way that it would be brought home even to those most alienated from it. Thus, in his own way, and taking into consideration the fact that communication always has its limits as long as we are situated in the historical actuality, Kierkegaard did try to discuss the matters and disagreements.

However, there is still (at least) one objection that a proponent of living reasonably would no doubt raise. That is, fourthly, the representatives of Greek and Enlightenment traditions would object that Kierkegaard’s ideal of living poetically is characterized by blind obedience. Such obedience is implied in Kierkegaard’s notion that “the truth is the way” and that the subjective aspect of


\[1961\] See WA, 73–78 and 83–84 / SV1 XI, 75–80 and 85–86.

\[1962\] See, for example, PV, 113–116 / SV1 XIII, 599–602.
the truth is more important than its objective one, i.e. that it is more important to strive to be in the truth than to comprehend it theoretically. This means that Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms Climacus and Anti-Climacus urge the would-be Christian to follow Christ and his directions without checking first whether Christ really was God and his directions were in harmony with objective reality. They suggest that only if the individual obeys absolutely, only if he follows the way, will the absolute truth become clear to him. Instead of first checking what he obeys and what makes him obey, the potential Christian is urged to give up critical inquiry and just have faith. Certainly, a follower of Socrates or Lessing would say “no thanks” to such Christianity. He would stick to continual striving for the truth and refuse to make the leap into blind obedience, would he not? And would he not be right in that? Does not religious fanaticism, which once again has raised its head in the modern world, remind us that blind religious obedience is not the way to the truth, but to madness and violence? And even if blind obedience would not lead the Kierkegaardian individualist into terror acts, as it has let the Christian and Muslim fundamentalists of our times, it could nevertheless be claimed that it destroys his personal life in that it makes him incapable of leading the full human life here on the earth. For at least in the final writings of Kierkegaard from the 1850s it becomes clear that the absolute relation to the absolute, which he advocates, demolishes all other relations. The relation to the infinite and eternal as if burns away all that is finite and temporal.

How could Kierkegaard’s Christian ideal of living poetically be defended against such criticism? First of all, one could remind the critic that in some important respects Kierkegaard’s ideal is not at all blindness: his ideal is the Socratic ideal of knowing oneself.

This ideal is emphasized by Judge William, who pits it against abstract philosophical contemplation,1965 and later by Johannes Climacus, who underscores that “to understand oneself in existence” was not only the principle of Greek philosophers, but it is also the Christian principle.1966 As, for example, Gregor Malantschuk has maintained, Kierkegaard’s dialectical thinking is also characterized by a quest for consistency and continuity.1967 Let me quote Kierkegaard’s own words from the manuscript Book on Adler (Bogen om Adler, written in 1846–1847):

[I]n the world of spirit continuity is not only a joy but is spirit itself—that is, continuity is spirit, and not to respect continuity qualitatively is to have one’s life outside the sphere of spirit, either in the sphere of worldliness or in the sphere of confusion. Continuity is not sameness, in continuity there is also change, but the continuity is that every change is made dialectically in relation to the preceding.1968

Hence, even if Kierkegaard emphasizes passion and other subjective qualities, he is also concerned with obtaining full self-awareness and consistency in individual life.1969

However, it must be admitted that in some sense Kierkegaard does advocate blind obedience. He claims that, through the dialectic that pertains to the ethical-religious life, the individual at some phase discovers that there is an “absolute object of faith and worship,” which it cannot comprehend.1970 In Kierkegaard’s view this object is Christ, whom we should obey unconditionally and follow, wherever he draws us with his love.1971 In this sense Kierke-
gaard, indeed, advocates blind obedience. But can such blindness be considered as irrational without further ado? If one is motivated by worship and by eternal happiness, is it irrational to obey unconditionally? If it is love and longing to eternity that is “burning in one’s soul,” perhaps it is indeed “better to burn out than fade away.” Who cares about the normal bourgeois life, if he has a strong passion for something better? At the same time one may notice that Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms do respect normal bourgeois life as long as it is conducted in the right ethical-religious spirit. Moreover, they urge no one to imitate Christ, if he does not feel himself personally drawn by God to following the road, and if he does not feel himself capable of taking it until the end.

It is also worth noticing that absolute obedience is not blind in the sense that it would lack an eye for the given historical situation. Kierkegaard’s view is that our action is still “supposed to be of benefit” and we are expected to endure suffering “because it fits into the whole.” Kierkegaard does not advocate, for example, “situationless renunciation,” that is, ascetism only for its own sake. If one is moved towards ascetism, as Kierkegaard was in

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1972 It is, of course, another question, and a matter of interpretation, whether Kierkegaard was himself motivated by love, for example, in his attack on Christendom 1854–1855.
1974 See PC, 67 / SV1 XII, 64. It is again another question whether it is possible to lead a normal bourgeois life in the historically given world, if one has the right ethical-religious spirit, i.e. the Christian spirit. But if it is not, then it is still the world that is cruel, not Christianity (see PC, 196 / SV1 XII, 181–182), and Kierkegaard is not to be blamed for irrationality, if he presents the eternally valid Christian truth, which opens the eyes not only to the sinfulness of the temporal world, but also to an eternal happiness that awaits after it.
1975 See PF, 56–57 / SV1 IV, 222–223 and PC, 67 / SV1 XII, 64.
his last years, then it must be because one is motivated both by “autopathy” and “sympathy” and driven to it by one’s calling and situation in the world.\textsuperscript{1978} The drive to ascetism must be spiritual; it must come from within and be based on our concern for the salvation of ourselves and others. At the same time ascetism must fit into the totality of human life. In the present historical situation ascetism could recommend itself, for example, on the basis of more global problems: on the basis of the environmental problems and poverty that are produced by our materialistic culture. In that sense, even the Kierkegaardian ascetism could be claimed as reasonable in our common world—indeed, more reasonable today than in his own age.

Above I have argued that Kierkegaard’s ideal of living poetically is not at all an irrational ideal. Kierkegaard’s ideal could be defended against the critique of the representatives of rationalist traditions. Thus, Kierkegaard scholars are right in dismissing the view of Kierkegaard as an irrationalist presented by Shestov, MacIntyre, and others. However, granted that Kierkegaard is not an irrationalist, he does champion “divine madness,”\textsuperscript{1979} and although Kierkegaard’s ideal could be backed by rational arguments, for him and his pseudonyms that would be only of secondary significance. Fundamentally, for Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms “the conclusions of passion” are the only dependable ones.\textsuperscript{1980} Calculation and abstract rationality do not produce a vision, a life-view that could motivate ethical and Christian life. Such a life-view is produced only by ethical-religious imagination and passion in the situation of actuality. According to Kierkegaard, the road to the truth is the divine passion that produces unity and understanding in the mid-

\textsuperscript{1979} See \textit{FT}, 16–17 and 23 / \textit{SV1} III, 69 and 75.
\textsuperscript{1980} See \textit{FT}, 100 / \textit{SV1} III, 147, and, for example, \textit{WL}, 225–245 / \textit{SV1} IX, 216–234.
dle of life. Skeptical and critical reflection, if not governed and directed by this passion, serve only to break the relation to the actual life.

Moreover, Kierkegaard differs from philosophers and scientists in his primary goals. As a paraphilosopher he managed to save an impressive amount of phenomena in his writings, and many such phenomena of human life that philosophers and scientists had ignored or forgotten. He also clarified our concepts and our theories on what is essential. However, as the fundamental human interest, he saw neither “the saving of the phenomena” nor the theoretical observation of the essential truth, but the saving of soul and the realization of the truth through one’s life. In my view, we do not make Kierkegaard into an irrationalist if we acknowledge that Kierkegaard was a religious author that advocated living poetically. On the contrary, that makes him a most important and pregnant thinker—even in the modern age.
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How did Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) situate the human subject into historical and social actuality? How did he take into consideration his own situatedness?

As key for understanding these questions the present work takes the ideal of “living poetically” that Kierkegaard outlines in his dissertation. In The Concept of Irony (1841) Kierkegaard takes up this ideal of the Romantic ironists and makes it into an ethical-religious ideal. The ideal of “living poetically” now comes to mean
- becoming brought up by God, while
- assuming ethical-religiously one’s role and place in the historical actuality.

Through an exegesis of Kierkegaard’s texts from 1843 to 1851 it is shown how this ideal governs his thought and action throughout his work.

The analysis of Kierkegaard’s ideal of “living poetically” not only shows how the Kierkegaardian subject is situated in its historical context. It also
- sheds light on Kierkegaard’s social and political thought,
- helps to understand Kierkegaard’s character as a religious thinker, and
- pits his ethical-religious orientation in life against its scientific and commonsense alternatives.

The work evaluates the rationality of the way of life championed by Kierkegaard by comparing it with ways of life dominated by reflection and reasoning. It uses the ideal of Kierkegaard in trying to understand the tensions between religious and unreligious ways of life.